NEW SERIAL BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN COMMENCES THIS WEEK.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 395. FOR WEEK ENDING JULY 25TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

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9ft. by 10½ft. " " "	8/6	12ft. by 15ft. " " "	15/9
9ft. by 12ft. " " "	9/6	12ft. by 18ft. " " "	19.6
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No. 30
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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 395.] For the Week ending July 25th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

HIGH PLAY.

A Comedy off the Stage.

By G. Manville Fenn.

CHAPTER I.

A GOOD MOTHER.

"OH, curse it all! my head! my head!"

Lord Braetoun jerked himself viciously from his right side to his left as he lay on a couch, and the effect was not soothing, for he uttered a groan, and then something else which made Lady Braetoun, a very fashionably-dressed, handsome, patrician dame, turn from the window in Hyde Park Gardens, where she was gazing thoughtfully out upon the various equipages passing, and look at her son with a half-mournful, half-contemptuous expression of countenance.

"Poor fellow!" she said softly, as she shrugged her shoulders, raised her eyebrows, and then took out a laced handkerchief, with which she carefully dabbed her forehead just where the none too abundant frizzed grey hair covered it with tiny curls.

This action necessitated a glance at one of the mirrors, which seemed gratifying, for she drew herself up and then took a few steps towards the couch.

"Does your head ache so much, Roderick?" she said.

"Ache!" he groaned. "It's as if boiling lead was running from side to side."

"Shall I ring for a cup of strong tea to be made, dear?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, do, pray, if you want it to be a hundred times worse," he cried fiercely. "My nerves are bad enough without strong tea."

"It always does mine good, my dear," said the lady coldly, as she arranged the full lace ruffles about her delicate blue-veined wrists.

"Does yours good! Well, what of that? You are a woman, aren't you?—Oh, dear; oh, dear!"

"But you are so impatient, my love. Really, Roderick, as a man you ought to try and bear pain with the mind of the stoic."

"D——n the stoics! The headache is unbearable."

"If you are going to use such language as that, Roderick, perhaps I had better leave you."

"I wish to goodness you would, and not stand there firing off platitudes at me. Can't stand an honest English oath,

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can't you? Why, that's nothing to what I used to hear the old man say to you."

"Let your father rest in his grave, my son, and try and pay a little respect to your mother, if you can."

"There, don't bother me with all that talk. You don't know what I am suffering."

"I pretty well do, but I cannot pity you. If you acted sensibly you would have been fit to go with me this morning to church."

The young man laughed bitterly.

"Be a good boy and walk with mamma to our pew, and carry the books, to go and sit among all the rest of the miserable sinners in lace and silk, scenting the place like so much incense——Ah! there it goes again."

"Lie still, then. If you had not burst out into that foolish tirade of irreverence you would not have felt that pang," said the lady with dignity, and she turned to gaze in a glass again, turning her head first to one side and then to the other, to pat and arrange her hair, unconscious of the fact that her son was gazing at her with a face full of contempt.

"Looks lovely," he said with a snarl. "Is that the new *coiffure* from Truefitt's?"

The wrinkles in Lady Braetoun's handsome face showed in a marked way for the moment, and there was a peculiar twitching about the corners of her lips, as she said coldly:

"I thought you were ill, Roderick."

"Well, so I am," he cried, with a peculiar drawing in of his breath, as if he were suffering intense pain.

"I should not have thought it of one who is well enough to insult his mother."

"Insult? Bah! You make me speak, with all your mincing. Anyone would think you were a young widow on the look out for a fresh husband."

"And you some coarsely-minded young man of the lower classes. That is not wit—it is not *badinage*, my son, only brutality, such, however, as I suppose I must expect from one who associates with grooms and betting men."

"That's right; go on. I wish you suffered as I do for half-an-hour. It would make you more feeling."

"I am quite ready to be sympathetic, and to do all I can for you, Roderick, if you will act like a reasonable being."

"You don't know how bad I am," he groaned.

"Oh yes, I do; it goes without saying; but I don't wonder at it after your dissipated life."

"Dissipated devil!"

"You force me to speak to you, my dear. I do not want to know anything about the life you lead, nor to bring you to making confessions of your folly."

"That's right; get a man down sick and helpless, and then jump upon him."

"It is my duty, Roderick, to jump upon you, as you so slangily term it."

"Then you should have begun earlier," he said bitterly.

"Perhaps so; but I trusted to my son's common sense. I had the dignity of our position to keep up, the exigencies of society to attend to. Succeeding as you did to the title and your father's fortune, I was willing to believe that my son—a Braetoun—would worthily support his position."

"Go on!—go on."

"Yes, I have much to say, and though it pains me I must go on. I ought, I know, to have tried to check you sooner, before you had ruined your property, and brought yourself down to what you are."

"A regular wreck, I suppose," he sneered.

"No, but one suffering bitterly from his follies. I hear too much about you. No, I do not play the spy. I try hard to remain in ignorance, and if I were selfish I should shrug my shoulders and say: Why should I trouble myself about him? I have enough for my wants; he must do as he pleases. But I am not selfish, Roderick. I think deeply about you and your interest, and I tell you now that it is quite time you ceased to sow your wild oats and thought about redeeming the past. I am really shocked. What do you expect is to be the end of all this keeping of racehorses and pretty actresses?"

"Pistol, I suppose."

"Worse and worse! A Braetoun talking of taking such a cowardly step as that! Shame! You are ten times worse than your father. Reckless, imprudent, a gambler perhaps, but he was always a nobleman. He would not let me suffer. But really if it had not been for his forethought in settling upon me what I have, I don't know where I should have been."

"Have you done?"

"No, Roderick, I have not done. I have let you go on in your own way all this time without doing anything, hoping that a change would come, but hoping in vain."

"I wish to goodness you would not worry me now I am so ill."

"I must. Now is the time to try and bring you to your senses. It is the only chance I have, Rod. You see you are getting worse and worse—constitution ruined—hopelessly involved in debt——"

"Oh, I shall make a *grand coup* one of these days, and clear everything off," he groaned.

"Not you. That's what every foolish racing and betting man thinks."

"Will you leave off, mother! My head's all of a whirl. There, it's of no use to make a fuss about it. I must keep on till I win, and once I do I'll sell the horses and have no more to do with them."

"And will you give up that other dreadful shameless expense?"

"Never you mind about that."

"But I do mind about it, Roderick. As your mother, it is my duty. Now, my dear boy, do be ruled by me. Do take my advice. You never will win enough on the turf to clear yourself."

"How do you know?"

"By experience. There is only one way to recoup yourself."

"Speculate?"

"Yes, if you like to call it so."

"What in?"

"Matrimony."

"I? Not fit to marry. Rubbish!"

"Yes, that is what you are talking. You must marry, Rod, my dear! It is your duty. Begin quite a new life, my dear, and clear the estate. Then turn quiet country gentleman."

"Ha, ha, ha!—Hff! Ah, my head!"

"Self-inflicted pain, Roderick. But come now; you know I am talking sense."

"I don't want a wife."

"Yes, you do. It is time you married."

"Who'd have me? You don't want me to marry that widow?"

"You might do worse, dear: she has a very fine fortune, and is a sweet-tempered little woman."

"Sweet-tempered little fool. Bah! Idiot! I won't have her. I wouldn't if she were a ten times millionairess, so drop it."

"I don't want you to marry her, dear."

"Then you've got another woman up your sleeve?"

"'Drop it!'—'up your sleeve!'—My dear Roderick, should you make use of such slang to your mother?"

"Oh, my head!"

"Let me lay my eau-de-Cologne moistened handkerchief on your forehead."

"Lay the coal-scuttle on it if you like, only don't bother me."

"I won't, my darling. There now, isn't that cool and pleasant?"

"Oh, it's very well, but smells spirity. I want a soda-and-brandy."

"No, no, not now. You really must not drink as you do, Roderick dear. Now, listen to me. I have a girl up my sleeve for you, if you will talk slang, you naughty boy."

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"Who is it?"

"That charming Miss Emsworth."

"Who's she?"

"Roderick! Now, my dear boy, you were introduced to her at Lady Baringham's, and she dined here with her father."

"Oh, her! Simpering bread-and-butter school miss."

"She is not, my dear! only sweet and innocent. The very woman for you. This is her first season. There are a dozen men wanting her, but I said as soon as she had been here an hour: 'That is the very girl for my boy, Roderick.' She is the only child, and Mr. Emsworth must have at least a million."

"What is he—a Whiteley, or John Barker?"

"Absurd boy! No! he is one of the British South Africa princes, and she'll be enormously rich. I had long talks with him, and he's a thoroughly keen, shrewd man of business."

"Then he won't be such a d——"

"Roderick!"

"Well, blessed fool as to marry his little girl to a used-up rake of a fellow, right to the eyes in debt and difficulties."

"Don't you be so fond of depreciating yourself, silly boy. You've been foolish, and now you are ill and repentant. I have seen a little of the world, my darling, and I know what Mr. Emsworth means by settling in England this season, and taking his daughter everywhere. These men have made money, and they want position. Trust me for it, he wants to match her to some scion of good family—to give his child a title, and the son-in-law a large fortune. Now do you see?"

"I don't want the chit. Silly schoolgirl, who could only say 'yes' and 'no.'"

"You did not get to know her. She is very sweet, highly accomplished, has a lovely voice, plays brilliantly, speaks three or four languages, and is charmingly pretty. Only wants the style that a season would give her. Rod, my boy, you have only to ask, and there is a delightful wife for you with a noble fortune. Come now, do be a good boy, and take my advice."

"What, go and tell the old man that I'm a regular wreck and want to marry his filly?"

"Filly! For shame, Roderick! Go to him and propose in due form, prior to going abroad."

"Going abroad? What, to get rid of my duns?"

"Oh, you dear, foolish, absurd child! No—no—no! You are out of order and want change. Make sure of her first, and then go and see Allan Murray or his father, tell him the exact truth about everything, and ask him where you had better go for three months—Ems, Baden, Aix, Cannes, or Algeria."

"Three months! Besides, I can't afford——"

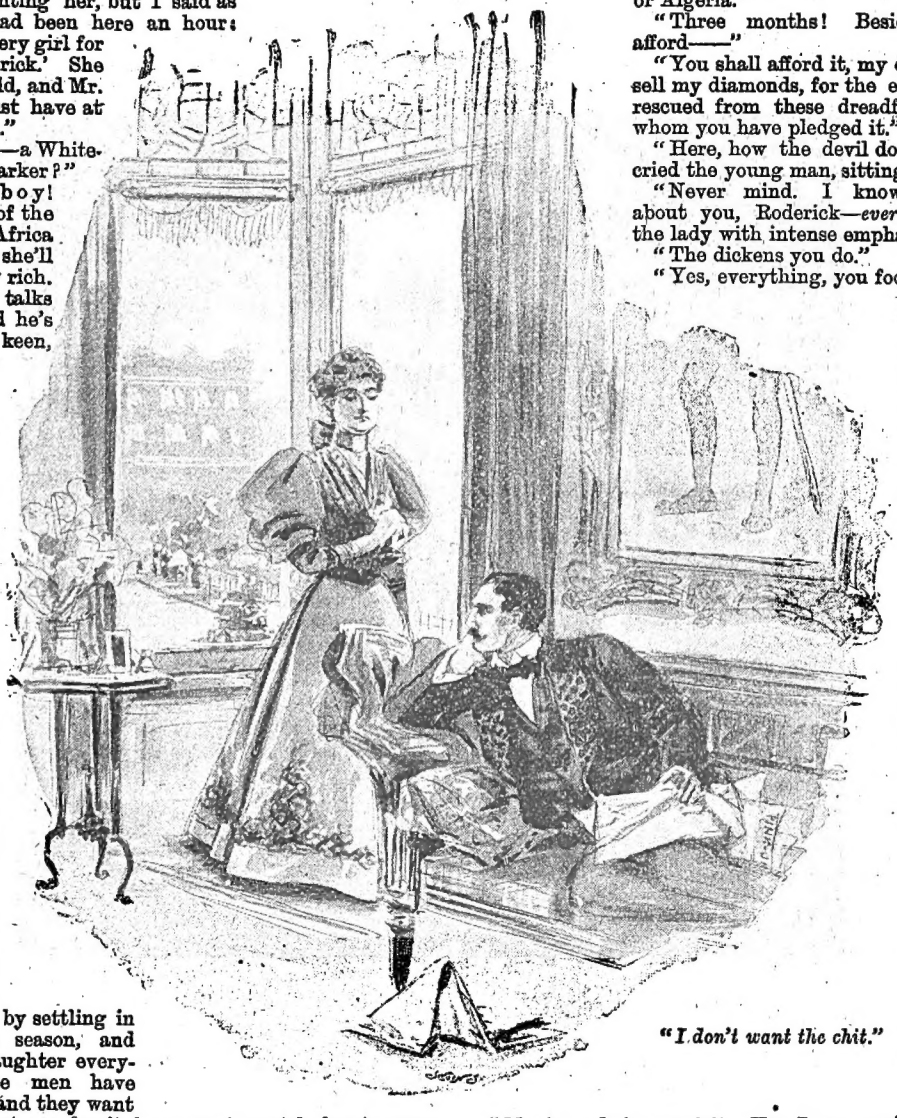
"You shall afford it, my dear, even if I sell my diamonds, for the estate must be rescued from these dreadful harpies to whom you have pledged it."

"Here, how the devil do you know?" cried the young man, sitting up.

"Never mind. I know everything about you, Roderick—*everything*," said the lady with intense emphasis.

"The dickens you do."

"Yes, everything, you foolish boy, and that it is time a certain dissipation came to an end. There, you know I am right, so do as I wish. *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute.* Before the three months are over you will be thoroughly well again, and I shall have managed Mr. Emsworth and his daughter. He will trust me to introduce his child to society and be her chaperon. I quite love the dear girl already. Then I shall persuade him to take her out for a month to wherever you are, and —there, do you see?"



"I don't want the chit."

"Messieurs, le jeu est fait. Yes, I see, mother. What a clever old girl you are!"

"Somebody need be clever, my dear."

"Is she all you say?"

"Ten times more, Roddy dear. A most loveable girl, and as innocent as she is high. Oh, you lucky fellow; it is a chance of chances."

"Is it? Don't count your chickens until——"

"Ah, but this little chicken is hatched, Rod, my dear. There, I'm very glad we've had this pleasant chat; you will be good now, won't you?"

"Oh yes, for I'm sick of living as I am."

"Of course he is, poor darling," said Lady Braetoun, bending down to re-saturate the handkerchief

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with scent and kiss her son's brow. "No wonder, poor boy."

"Gently with that scent; you are soaking me. What time is it?"

"Half-past twelve, dear, and the people are actually coming out of church."

"What!"

"Roderick, my darling, what is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," cried the young man, dragging at the bell. "Only an appointment that I must keep."

"No, no, my darling, pray lie still. Have lunch with me to-day."

* * * * * *

"Did you ring, my lady?"

"No, I did. I ordered the phaeton to be round at twelve; why the dickens isn't it at the door?"

"Been at the door half-an-hour, my lord," said the servant who had answered the bell.

"Then why the dickens didn't you come up and tell me?"

"Your lordship's orders were that you were not to be told, because you could always see for yourself."

"Go to the devil, idiot!"

"Yes, my lord," and the door closed.

"You shouldn't speak so pettishly to the servants, Roderick darling," said Lady Braetoun, "it will make them think you irritable. Are you going to have a drive, then?"

"If I wasn't going for a drive I shouldn't have ordered the horses round should I?"

"No, my dear; of course not. Good-bye, darling. You will be back to dinner?"

"No; I shall dine at the club."

"Very well, dear. But you will think seriously of what I said?"

Roderick, Viscount Braetoun, was scowling at his handsome features in the glass, noticing the dark rings under his eyes, and a peculiar twitching at the corners. Then, without giving further answer than a short nod, he strode out of the drawing-room, and his mother moved to the window to see, a few minutes after, a handsome pair of high-stepping horses driven up from where the groom was waiting, her son step in, and the stylish phaeton dash off at a rapid rate.

"Ha!" she said softly, "I did not think he would take it so well. Terribly plebeian; but she is very sweet, and it will be our salvation."

After which Lady Braetoun picked up the scent-laden handkerchief her son had tossed off his forehead, and seated herself on the nearest couch, looking handsome with her grey hair and stately bearing, quite the patrician mother, smiling, placid, and content, in the satisfaction of what she looked upon as a good Sunday morning's work.

CHAPTER II.

Playing with Death.

Roderick, Lord Braetoun's appointment was in the Strand, for he drew up at a well-known restaurant, gave the reins to the groom, and upon entering walked through at once to the inner room, where, at a table in a corner, a particularly striking little figure was seated, and rose eagerly as he appeared.

"Oh, Rod, dear, I was getting in such a fidget."

"What about, Baby?"

"I thought you didn't mean to come, but it's all right now."

"Didn't mean to come! Didn't I say I'd come?" he cried pettishly.

"Yes, and I ought to have known, but I am so stupid. I've ordered the lunch, so as to be ready, for I do so want to go—omelette, sweetbread, cutlet, and a bottle of dry."

"Humph! That's right," said Braetoun, seating himself and gazing rather wistfully at the piquant little figure in pale blue and a gauzy diaphanous bonnet, with quite enough lace here and there to give the wearer a fairy-like—theatrically fairy-like—aspect. Her face was covered by a delicate veil, which needlessly heightened a perfect complexion, and half hid her fair, clustering golden hair, whose tint gave the lie to any suspicion of aureoline, or any other *coiffeur's* preparation. In short, she bore careful inspection, and the most particular in taste would have declared Lucy Lee, known as "Baby," late of the chorus of the Theatre Royal Thespis, to be absolutely the most charming little blonde upon whom eyes had ever rested.

"Oh, what a serious look," she said, as she began to take off her gloves and display a pair of the prettiest hands possible, and then to remove her veil, which was lightly tied on behind, this last process helping to explain the sobriquet by which she was known, for baby-like dimples played about in cheeks and chin, and again at the knuckles, or where the knuckles should have shown in her soft, white, little hands. "Not cross, are you, Roddy, dear?"

"Cross? No. Tired; and got a horrible head on."

"Oh, poor, dear, darling old man!" she cooed. "Only wait till we're down in the country, and that ogre of a groom isn't looking, and I'll kiss the poor, aching place. Mustn't kiss it here, dear, must I?"

"Don't be a little fool," he said sourly. "Oh, here's the cham.," as the waiter came up, carrying an ice pail. "Yes; open it."

The cork was dexterously sent flying, the pale pink, amber wine poured foaming out from glass to glass till each was filled, without a bead running over the side. Then, as the waiter hurried off for the first dish, the glasses were raised, there was a long, silent look, and a moustache dipped in one, a pair of classically-formed, ruddy lips touched the other, to take a few sips in the same time that the masculine vessel was drained.

"Poor old thirsty boy! I am so sorry that the head's bad."

"Hah! It'll be better now," said Braetoun; and his face lit up a little as he gazed approvingly at his companion's costume. "That's capital, Baby."

"Do you like it, dear?" and as he nodded she added with childish delight: "Oh, I am so glad."

"It all suits you perfectly. Ah, you're a horribly pretty little thing."

"Horribly!" she said, with a pout of her rosy lips. "What a shame!"

"Well, you can't help it, pet," he continued, half mockingly; "but you really are a puzzle to me."

"Puzzle? Why?"

"Because you ought to have been the daughter of some big pair of blue-blooded swells, instead of a farmer's daughter. How did you come?—hansom?"

"No, in the brougham, of course. I wasn't going to let that lazy fellow have nothing to do on a Sunday. He gets dreadfully idle and impudent. There, it's only about one o'clock now, and he'll have nothing else to do all day. He don't know what work is. He ought to have been on the stage. I say, how funny and quiet this place looks on a Sunday."

"Humph! yes; very. Go on; you're not eating."

"I'm not hungry, dear; I want to get out in the country. It seems a shame not to make haste. We can eat at any time."

"Yes, of course. Well, don't be impatient."

"All right; and you must eat, dear. Is your head getting better?"

"Yes. Sight of you has done me good."

"I wish that was quite true, Rod," she said, resting her elbows on the table, laying her little white chin in her hands and gazing at him earnestly with her dark grey eyes.

"Well, so it is," he retorted.

"No, only a compliment; but it is true with me."

"I say, 'bilboes,' little lady."

"Oh, I forgot," she said, colouring like a detected child, as she hastily removed her elbows from the table. "But it's of no use, Rod. I'm not a lady, and I never shall be one. But so long as you don't mind, it doesn't matter, does it?"

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At a table in a corner, a particularly striking little figure was seated.

"Not a bit," he said. "Come, have some more wine."

"No; I haven't drunk this, dear."

"Never mind; freshen it up. Make your eyes sparkle, Baby."

She smiled and held her glass, sipping from it after it had been refilled, but it did not have the effect he declared, for the pretty eyes grew slightly dim and suffused.

But they began to sparkle soon after, when their owner was seated beside Braetoun in the phaeton and the horses trotted west.

At Hyde Park Corner they were checked, and, as if already tutored, the groom stepped down from behind.

"Seven o'clock, my lord?" he said.

"Half-past."

The horses darted off again, and they were not checked till well beyond Esher, at the bottom of a very retired mossy lane, deep in woodlands. Rein was drawn at the gateway leading to a low thatched farmhouse, half hidden in ivy and other creepers.

At the sound of wheels a weaseley-looking, thin man, with the face and form of a boy, came trotting down, and pulled off his stableman's cap as he ducked down his head.

"Day, Sam."

"Day, m'lord; day, m'lady."

"How's the mare?"

"Splendid, m'lord; never see anything like her."

"Humph, where's your father?"

"Hout, m'lord."

"Eh? Out?" said Braetoun sharply. "Where's he gone?"

"Dunno, m'lord. Hout with the old woman. Chutch, p'r'aps."

"Church!" said Braetoun scornfully, as he drew up by the garden. "Here, take the horses out, and give them a good rub down and feed. As soon as that's done saddle the mare, and bring her into the field."

"Yes, m'lord," said the little groom obsequiously; and he hurried off muttering to himself, while his master strolled across an inclosure through a gate, and into what in days gone by had been the home field of the farm, an extensive tract of some thirty acres, shut in by trees, and, having just recovered from the late mowing, whose result was shown in a couple of goodly stacks, now stretched out in a beautiful green lawn, over which the rooks were sailing, their hoarse cries made musical by mellowing distance.

"Oh, look at the flowers, the dear old buttercups and daisies!" cried the girl; and in a few minutes her delicate white gloves were stained with green, as she kept on picking till she had quite a bunch.

"What a little goose it is!" said Braetoun with a smile full of contempt. "Wish you'd be content with them always, instead of orchids and stephanotis."

"Well, so I should be, if I could pick them for myself. Oh, I say, Rod, it's just like being at home again. It is so beautiful. How nice it all smells!"

"This will smell nicer," said the young man, taking out and lighting a cigar. "Wonder how long that idiot will be! I wanted to talk to his confounded father about the mare."

"Why didn't we go to the stables and see the dear?"

"Because you haven't got on your stable suit, you extravagant puss. Look at your gloves."

"Oh dear, what a mess! Never mind; you'll buy me another pair, dear. I should like to lie down in the grass and roll."

"If you do, I won't drive you home. Look here, Baby, you were never meant for a lady, but for a South Sea island savage, where the young ladies wear nothing but flowers. You'd be quite at home there."

"For shame, Rod! Well, let's go there. I should like it; I'm so tired of London. Who'd go gravel-grinding in

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the Park when they could come here? Hi—loo—loo—loo—loo! There goes a rabbit!"

"Be quiet, you little savage!" cried Braetoun, laughing. "Come, walk about properly. Suppose anyone saw you."

"But there is no one to see us here, Rod; that's why I like it. Seems like being Adam and Eve in the Garden."

"Oh, does it? Well, perhaps so, for that scoundrel Vinnis plays the devil here."

"Don't be cross, Rod, but do let's enjoy ourselves now we've come."

"All right, go on then; but you don't expect me to begin picking buttercups and daises, do you?"

The girl made no reply, but darted at the globular head of a dandelion flower in seed, picked it, and then, pouting out her lips, began to puff at it to see in how many breaths she could send the winged seeds flying.

"Look at that," she cried; "it's just like it used to be when I was a good little girl."

"What!" cried Braetoun, with a boisterous laugh; "why, you were never a good little girl in your life."

"That I was, till father and mother died, and I came up to nasty old London, and Aunt Duncan. She's a dear good old thing, but I don't think—I don't think——"

"What don't you think, Baby?"

"Look, here comes Bella," cried the girl excitedly, as the groom rode through the gate, mounted upon a satin-coated mare which touched the sward so lightly that she seemed to be gliding along on air. "Oh, you darling, how I do love you!"

"Nice she-devil to love, 'pon my soul!"

"For shame, sir! She's only wicked to you men, and you deserve it. See how gentle she is with me."

Proof positive was given the next moment, for, as the groom rode up, Lord Braetoun raised his hand to pat the animal's glossy neck, when she stopped short, uttered a low, squealing cry, and made a dog-like snap at his hand.

"Ah, you beast!" he cried fiercely.

"Don't, don't," said the girl. "It's only her play; look here."

"Keep back; she'll savage you," cried Braetoun.

"Not she. You wouldn't hurt me, would you, Bella, you beauty?" said the girl, going close up to the mare, which sniffed at the flowers and then suffered herself to be patted and caressed, the girl ending by raising the animal's muzzle and then kissing her between the eyes.

Suffered herself to be patted and caressed.

"That will do," said Braetoun impatiently. "She isn't a lap-dog, Baby. Now, Sam, give her a canter."

The sinister-looking lad pulled his cap down tightly, gathered up the reins, and pressed the mare's sides with his legs, when she shook her head violently, sidled, arched her back, and uttered a low, whinnying noise.

"Quiet!" cried the lad harshly, and, after making two or three bounds, she went off at an elastic canter towards the trees, and then down by the side of the hedge towards the lower part of the great field.

"Splendid, splendid!" muttered Braetoun. "She'd be perfect if it were not for her temper."

"She is perfect," said the girl. "Look at her. Oh, how I should like to ride her! What would she be without a bit of temper?"

"Bearable. She's a devil with," said Braetoun, laughing. "Well, she must be safe for a few races to come; and she need be. But hang the beast! I hate her."

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"Glad of it. She's beautiful enough to make you love her."

"Well, suppose I did, Baby," he said contemptuously, "what then?"

"I should hate her. Don't want you to love anything but me."

She darted a look full of passion at him, but he did not notice it, his eyes being fixed on the mare as she galloped along with her head down and neck curved, the lad riding her perfectly and the hoofs hardly seeming to touch the soft turf.

"Capital—capital!" muttered Braetoun.

"Yes, she is a darling," cried the girl as she too watched now, with her lips parted and her white teeth glistening. "Faster, Sam, faster. Give her her head."

"No, no, no, no," growled the young man—needlessly, though, for the horse and her jockey were far beyond hearing. "He's going quite right. I don't want her made hot. So you don't want me to love anyone but you, eh, Baby?" he said, smiling.

"Of course not."

"Humph! Fellow had better love a mare than a woman."

"No, he hadn't. She'd cost more and you couldn't trust her."

"Nor a woman, neither."

"You're a wicked story, Rod, that you are, and if you were quite well I'd punish you. I say, do get quite well again, there's a dear. Oh, do look, though! Here she comes. Oh, you pet, you pet! What did you say Bella Donna meant?"

"Poison," said Braetoun shortly.

"That you didn't, Rod. It was beautiful girl—no, beautiful lady; and so she is."

The lad drew rein close by them, and the girl went to the mare's head to caress her, while Braetoun gave her rider a few instructions in a low voice, ending by laying his hand heavily on his companion's arm.

"Stand back, Lucy," he said sharply; and the act seemed to startle the mare, which shied violently, and went off at a tremendous gallop for a hundred yards or so before the lad got her head again.

"Temper," muttered Braetoun.

"'Tisn't," said the girl decisively. "She thought you were going to hit her with a fork handle. I know she's been ill-used."

"Clever! And how do you know?"

"Because that's how one of our mares used to do; and father caught the horsekeeper one day hitting her with the fork handle, and father knocked him down, and was summoned for it."

"Summoned or not summoned, I'd knock anyone down who ill-used one of my horses, Baby. But it isn't that Bella Donna's a regular savage, and that lad's the only person living who can ride her."

"Nonsense! I could. Let me, now."

"You? Absurd!"

"It isn't, Rod. She'd be as gentle as a lamb with me. Send Sam in when they come back. I must have a canter."

"Without a riding habit?"

"I don't want a riding habit. I never used to have one."

"But there is no side saddle."

"I don't want a side saddle. I could ride her barebacked. I used to ride everything at the farm. Why, Rod, I've ridden the colts, the donkeys, the old cart-horses, and I once had a trot all round the field on an old Alderney cow. Oh, it was fun—all jolty and jog, and she was such a bony thing. Ah, those were happy old days!"

"Happy old days?"

"Yes, but I was never so happy as I am now. You do pet and spoil me so."

"I believe you want to get back to the stage. Think of the applause, bouquets, and diamonds—notes too."

"Don't be a brute to me, Rod. You know I always hated the silly idiots, with their flattery and stupid presents. Then you came, and everything seemed so different. I say, Rod dear, oughtn't you to marry me?"

"No. Spoil you," he said roughly. "Perfect as you are."

"Couldn't be happier, could we? Only I feel sometimes as if it would be right. But I couldn't love you more, and the country and flowers, and horses."

"And champagne, and a brougham, and money."

"Pooh! I don't care for them a bit. I am tired of them directly, but I am never tired of being down here with you."

"Bosh! You're getting tired of me now, and want to get rid of me, so as to go back to the theatre."

"Rod!"

Only that word, full of reproach in its tones, as the tears started to the girl's eyes, and she clasped the speaker's arm. But she burst into a half-hysterical laugh directly.

"You shouldn't talk to me like that, Rod," she said softly. "It's only teasing, and I don't mind, because you know better; but it hurt me, dear. There. It's all gone now. Oh, do look at the mare; isn't she lovely? Look how her skin shines. What a shame to put that thin, ugly boy on her! Rod, I must have one canter."

"Absurd!"

"Well, I like to do absurd things sometimes. I will ride. Here, you, Sam Vinnis," she cried as the lad rode up, "jump down."

The lad glanced at his master and obeyed, while the girl took the reins and began caressing the mare.

"You can go back to the stables. I'll bring the mare in."

The lad grinned, and hearing no counter order from Braetoun, he walked awkwardly back, with his legs very wide apart.

The girl waited till he had passed through the gate, and was out of sight, while Braetoun looked at her curiously, and

"I should kill her."

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as if something were passing through his mind. Then he started, and turned paler when she spoke.

"Now, Rod, give me a leg up."

"Nonsense!" he said angrily, "she'll turn her head and bite you directly."

"She won't. You wouldn't bite your little mistress, would you, beauty? You sweet—not you. He tells wicked stories about you, you darling."

"Mind, Baby. I tell you she'll savage you."

"She will you, if you say such wicked things about her. Come and help me on."

"I won't. Why, you'd be off in a moment, and break your neck."

"Oh dear, should I?" she cried mockingly; "and if I did what would darling old Roddy do? Go and sit in a corner and cry; or be very glad to have got rid of a tiresome, expensive, extravagant thing, and then marry some very good, nice lady in his own set. I believe you'd like to get rid of me and do that, so now's your chance."

He gazed at her wildly as his scene with his mother flashed before his mental gaze, then turned ghastly pale.

Lucy burst into a mocking peal of laughter.

"There, sir, how do you like to be teased? That made you feel. Poor old darling! It will be a lesson to you not to tease me. I know: he couldn't live without me, could he, beauty? We know, don't we? Come, that's right; rest your pretty head on my shoulder. We love one another, and we're not a bit jealous. Now then, you shall take me round the field twice, as fast as you can go. We don't want side saddles, or riding habits, or any of that nonsense. We understand one another, and we'll show him how we can go. Now, stand quite still, beauty, while I mount. Come, Rod, make a stirrup of your hands."

"I will not," he said angrily, and speaking with a peculiar look in his eyes.

"Thank you," she said, with a gentle look. "I like that. I'm so glad. If you hadn't said that, and turned to be so cross, I should have felt that you didn't care whether I did or no. But you would care, because you do really love me—very, very dearly. Rod," she whispered, as she nestled to him, with the rein over her arm, "I am glad I'm so pretty."

He caught her in his arms, for they were quite alone, and the mare started slightly.

"You little mass of vanity," he said, as he held her tightly. "Proud of your pink and white face, and bright eyes?"

"Not a bit," she said, "I'm only glad because I know you like me to look nice. Now help me on."

"No—no," he said, starting again, and with the peculiar look coming into his eyes.

"Yes, please—please; I want to. I must ride. Help me, Rod."

"I can't," he said; "it isn't safe for you."

She burst into a little, silvery, rippling laugh.

"What nonsense! I could ride anything. Come, help me."

She gave him a long, earnest look, and as he stooped down and made a stirrup of his hands, she placed one tiny little foot in them, laid a hand upon the saddle, and the next moment was seated, the mare not flinching in the least. Then she laughingly settled her right leg over the pommel, and shook out her dress, patting down the stiff folds and looking at him archly.

"Now, sir," she said, "how do I look—pretty?"

"Pretty?" he said, as he settled her tiny foot in the stirrup after shortening the leather. "Lovely."

"What nonsense! But will you always think so?"

"Always."

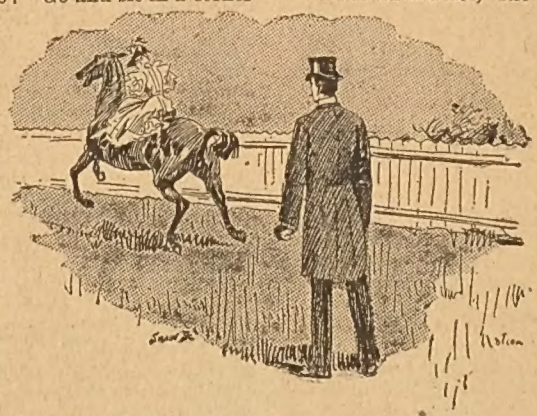
"When the little crows' feet come in the corners, and won't be stopped up with powder? Oh, Rod," she whispered, as she bent down and kissed him; "I know. But you must always love me, Rod, because if you were to throw me over I should—I should——"

"Yes—what?" he said huskily.

"Turn like the mare, and show how much devil I had in me. I should kill her."

"What!" he said, starting violently.

"I should kill her," she said, as she leant down with her face very close to his. "Yes, I know. It would be because there was someone else for whom you were throwing me over. I've seen it done—often. But I'm not like they were. I couldn't bear it. I should kill her, and then I should kill myself. Yes," she went on, with a peculiar smile, "it sounds ugly, doesn't it? But I should, somehow, for I couldn't bear for anyone ever to look in your eyes as I do, and put her arms about your neck. You are mine, Rod, and I'm yours, and——what am I talking about? There, let go of the rein. Why did you catch it?"



"Mad little fool; it would serve her right."

"Because you must not go," he said huskily, as he forced himself to speak, and get rid of the strange paralysing sensation that troubled him.

"Yes, I must. I will. Let go!"

"No," he said, with a boisterous, unnatural laugh. "Look at that devil, now, she's laying down her ears."

"Nonsense! What has come to you?"

"Nice question," he said roughly, "after your talking like you have been. Here, come down."

"I won't."

"I tell you I don't want to come and pick you up all soft, with a lot of bones broken."

"I should think not. I won't let you have a cripple to pet. Let go."

"I shall not. There, I'll walk her up to the stable."

"Rubbish!"

"I will not let you ride her. Look at her; she's as skittish as—as——"

"Oh, say it!—as I am. Now, don't be absurd. Let go."

"I tell you I will not. I can't let you. I—I feel as if something would happen."

"Nonsense! You dear, loving, careful old boy; but I won't break your heart by coming to grief. Let go, Rod, I must have my ride. It sends a thrill all through me as I feel her breathe. It's like sitting on air—like being part of her. Now let go."

"I will not," he panted. "You have no grip of the saddle, and that she-devil will——"

Snatch.

Quick as thought, she twitched the rein from his hand; the mare made a deer-like leap, and they went off like the wind which swept by as a cloud covered the sun, while in imagination Braetoun saw her slip from her seat, to be dragged by the stirrup at the heels of the mare, and something seemed to whisper to him.

"And then you would be free."

"Mad little fool; it would serve her right!"

(To be continued.)

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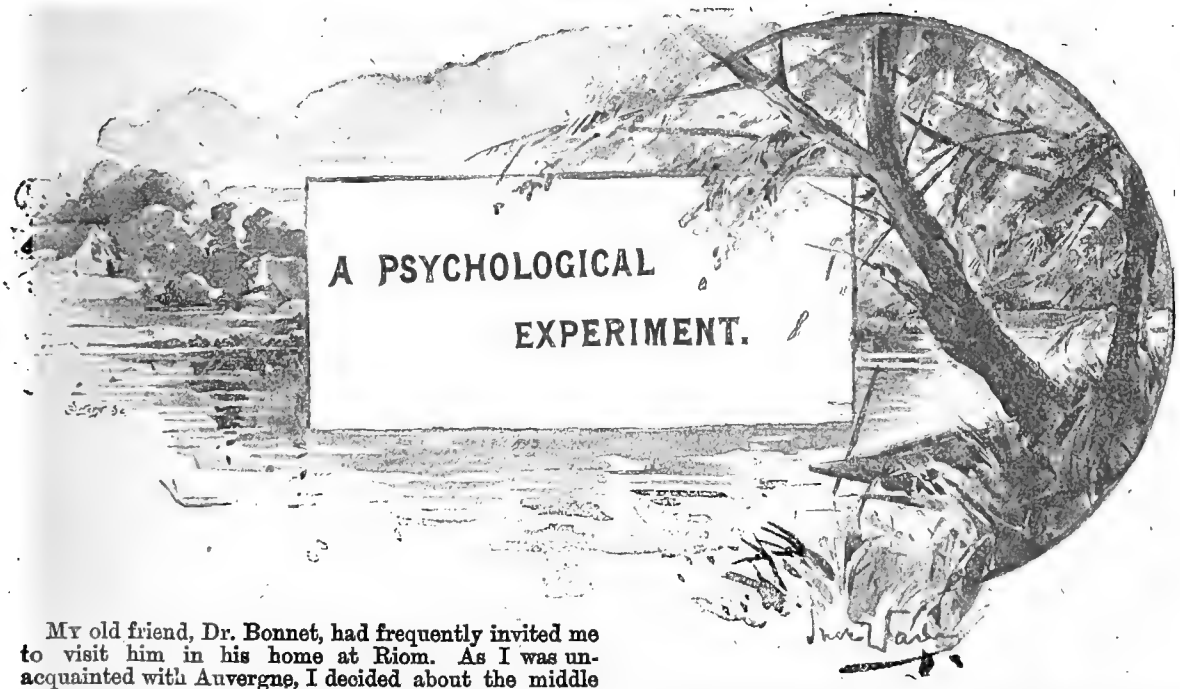

My old friend, Dr. Bonnet, had frequently invited me to visit him in his home at Riom. As I was unacquainted with Auvergne, I decided about the middle of the summer of 1876 to accept the invitation.

I arrived by the morning train, and the first face I saw on the platform was that of the Doctor. He was clad in grey, wore a round, black, soft felt hat with wide brim and a very tall crown, narrowing as it rose to the shape of a chimney-pot, a genuine Auvergnat hat, which suggested a charcoal-burner. Togged out thus, in his light suit, broad hat and bushy white hair, the doctor had the air of a young old beau.

He embraced me with the frank delight that country dwellers always exhibit on seeing arrive long-desired friends, and waving his arms around him, proudly exclaimed: "Behold Auvergne!" As for me, I gazed, but saw only a chain of mountains whose truncated cones might have stood for extinct volcanoes.

After a while, when I had swallowed a cup of *café au lait* and rested a little in the doctor's house, he dragged me out again to see the old city, obliging me to admire the apothecary's shop and the other celebrated old buildings, black and gloomy, but pretty as trinkets, with their richly sculptured fronts. At last, before one of them, Doctor Bonnet asked me to wait a bit while he entered for a professional call.

"I'll not be gone a minute," said he, "and afterwards we'll go to the Chatel-Guyon Hill and view from there the city and the whole Puy-de-Dome range. Wait here on the pavement. I'll just run upstairs and straight down again."

The house before which he left me standing was one of those sombre old country houses, closed, mute and mournful. It seemed to me, besides, to have a specially sinister countenance, the cause of which I soon discovered—all the broad windows of the second storey were closed halfway up with stout, wooden shutters. Only the upper part was open, as if they had intended to hinder the people shut up in this vast stone coffer from looking into the street.

When the Doctor reappeared I told him what I had noticed.

"Yes," responded he, "you are right. The poor creature shut in there is never allowed to see what passes outside. She is crazy—an idiot, or rather a simpleton—that which you Normans term a '*niente*.' Ah, it is a sorrowful story, at the same time a wonderfully strange and interesting case in pathology. Shall I gave you details?"

"Yes," said I, and he resumed:

"It is twenty years now since the owners of that house, my clients, had a child, a girl, like all other girls apparently. But I soon perceived that while the body of the little one developed admirably, her intelligence remained inert. She walked at a very early age, but absolutely refused to talk. At first I believed her deaf; then I found that she heard perfectly, but that she did not understand. Loud noises made her tremble, startled and frightened her, though she could not comprehend their causes.

"She grew; she was superb, but mute—mute through lack of sense. I sought every means in my power to rouse a glimmer of intelligence in that torpid brain; nothing succeeded. I thought that I had noticed something like recognition of her nurse; but once weaned she knew her mother no more. She never knew how to speak that word, the first that infants lisp and the last that soldiers cry on the battle-field—'mother.' Occasionally vague stammerings or meaningless squalls fell from her lips; nothing more.

"When the weather was fine she laughed continually, uttering soft cries that one might compare to the cooing of birds; when it rained she wept and moaned dismally, frightfully, like the plaint of dogs howling at death. She liked to roll on the grass in the fashion of young animals, to run like a mad thing; and she clapped her hands joyously every time she saw the sun entering her room. When her window was opened she clapped her hands again and threw herself about in her bed in order to be dressed the sooner.

"She appeared, however, to make no distinctions

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between persons, between her mother and her nurse; between her father and me; between the coachman and the cook. I liked her unfortunate parents, and went to see them nearly every day. I also dined with them frequently, which allowed me to see that Bertha—for so they named her—that Bertha, I say, seemed to recognise the dishes and to prefer some to others.

"She was then twelve years of age, but developed like a girl of eighteen, and taller than I. The idea came to me then to foster her gluttony and by this means to bring into her mind an appreciation of differences, to force her, through the faculty of taste, the animal love of certain savours, if not to reasoning, at least to instinctive distinctions, which would clearly constitute a sort of material working of thought. We could, later on, perhaps, by making an appeal to her passions, to her appetite, and by carefully choosing those that would be able to serve us, obtain a sort of return shock from the body to the dormant intellect that would, little by little, increase the insensible working of her brain.

"In pursuance of this plan I, one day, placed before her two plates, one of soup, the other of very sweet vanilla cream, obliging her to taste alternately one and the other. Then I left her free to select for herself. She ate the plate of cream. In a short time I had made her gluttonous—so gluttonous, in fact, that she seemed to have in her soul but one thought, or rather the one desire, to eat. She recognised perfectly the various dishes, reached for those she liked and greedily seized them. She wept, too, when they were taken from her.

"I then thought of teaching her to come to the dining-room at the sound of the bell. It was a long task; I accomplished it, nevertheless. There was assuredly established in her clouded understanding a connection between the sound and her taste, a sympathy between two senses, a call from one to the other, consequently a sort of linking of ideas, if one could term an idea that faint, that instinctive bond of union between two organic functions.

"I pushed my experiment still further and taught her—with what difficulty!—to recognise the meal hours on the dial of the clock. For a long while it was impossible for me to hold her attention upon the hands, but I succeeded at last in making her notice the striking. The method was simple. I stopped the dinner bell ringing, and everyone rose to go to the table when the little hammer struck the hour of noon, etc, etc. But here success ended. To count the strokes I could not teach her. She simply darted to the door each time the clock struck, then, little by little, was able to grasp the fact that the striking had not all the same value from the point of view of repasts, and her eye, guided by her ear, rested frequently on the dial.

"Having noticed this I was careful every day at twelve and at six o'clock to put my finger on the given number exactly as the sound she awaited rang out, and I soon perceived that she followed attentively the march of the little brass hands that I had often moved in her presence. She had understood—I should say rather that she had seized the meaning. I had forced upon her the knowledge, or to make it still clearer, forced upon her the sensation of the hour as one does with carp—which have not, however, the assistance of clocks—by feeding them every day at exactly the same moment.

"Once this result reached, all the timekeepers in the house occupied her exclusive attention. She passed the days watching them, listening for them and awaiting the hours, from which happened something that was very funny. The works of a pretty little Louis XVI. clock that hung at the head of her bed got out of order and failed to strike. She noticed it. She had waited twenty minutes with her eye on the hands, for ten o'clock to sound. But when the needle passed the figure she was stupified at hearing nothing, so stupified that one saw plainly that she was agitated by one of those violent emotions which move us in the face of a great catastrophe.

"And stranger still, she had the patience to remain before the little dial till eleven o'clock came to see what would happen. She heard nothing still, naturally; then, suddenly, seized with a mad rage at being deceived, or with fright at being face to face with an inexplicable mystery, or with the furious impatience of a passionate nature before an obstacle, she caught up the tongs from the chimney corner and in a second had smashed the clock to atoms.

"Her brain, then, was working, calculating in an obscure fashion, it is true, and in a narrow limit, for I was still unable to make her distinguish people as she distinguished hours. To obtain from her a further stir of intelligence we would have to appeal to her passions in the material sense of the word. Of this we soon had another and terrible proof.

* * * * *

"She had become magnificent, a type of her race, a sort of admirable but stupid Venus. She was now sixteen, and I had rarely seen such beauty of form, suppleness of shape and regularity of features. I have said a Venus; yes, a Venus, blonde, plump, vigorous, with her great limpid eyes, vacant, blue as a flax-flower, and wide mouth with full fleshy lips, the mouth of a glutton, a sensualist, a mouth for kisses.

"Well, one morning her father entered my surgery with a strangely disturbed air, and seated himself without even responding to my good-morning.

"'I—I am here to speak to you upon a very serious matter,' said he at last; 'is it—is it possible for Bertha to marry?'

"I jumped with amazement and involuntarily cried out:

"'Marry! Bertha! It is incredible!'

"'Yes, I know—but—reflect, Doctor; we have hoped—we have thought, you see, that possibly—if she—had children it would be a help to her, a great happiness, besides, in short, that her mind would awaken through the joys of maternity.'

"I was greatly perplexed. It was reasonable. It might be that this thing, so new—this wonderful instinct of motherhood that throbbed in the breasts of brutes as in the heart of woman, that makes the hen throw herself into the jaws of the dog to defend her little ones—would bring about a revolution, a complete transformation in that dormant brain, and start to working the motionless mechanism of thought. I immediately recalled, too, an example that had come under my observation. I had possessed some years before a little hunting dog, a female, so stupid that I could do nothing with her. She had pups, and became at once—I cannot say intelligent—but certainly as well developed mentally as many another dog.

"Scarcely had I foreseen this possibility than I, too, was eager to marry off Bertha, not so much through friendship for her and her poor parents, though assuredly that helped, as through scientific curiosity. What would come of it? There was a strange problem here.

"'Perhaps you are right,' I answered the father, 'we

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can only try, but—but you will never find a man that will consent to this.'

"'Yes,' said he in a low voice, 'I have found him.'

"I was dumbstruck, but managed to stammer out:

"'A suitable match—someone—someone in your own station?'

"'Yes,' said he briefly; 'it was of that I came to tell you and to consult you. It is Gaston du Bois, of Lucelles.'

"I had nearly cried out: 'The scoundrel!' but caught myself in time, and said, instead:

"'So be it, if Du Bois suits you.'

"The poor man warmly shook my hand.

"'In a month from now, then,' said he, 'the marriage shall be.'

* * * * *

"Briefly, Gaston du Bois, of Lucelles, though a man of good family, was a gentleman of leisure who had run through all his paternal inheritance, mired himself in debt by a thousand questionable means, and now simply sought a new way of procuring money. He had found it here. Handsome, strong and hearty, though wild and of that odious race of fast livers, he appeared to me a sufficiently suitable husband, inasmuch as later on he could be got rid of with a simple pension.

"He came, then, to the house to pay court to the beautiful 'innocent,' who, moreover, seemed to please him. He brought her flowers, kissed her hand, sat at her feet and regarded her with tender eyes; but she gave no heed to his attentions, and never seemed to distinguish him from the others living about her.

"The marriage took place.

"Soon afterwards I went to see Bertha, to read on her face, if possible, if change had come to her. But I found her as I had found her every day before, preoccupied solely with the clocks and with dinner. He, on the contrary, seemed really to have affection for her, and laughed and played with her as with a petted kitten. He had nothing better to do.

"Then I began to make almost daily visits to the married pair, and before long I saw that the young wife recognised her husband, and threw upon him the greedy glances that hitherto she had kept for sugared dishes. She followed his movements, distinguished his step on the stairs or in the adjoining room, and clapped her hands when he came, with a countenance transfigured by a glow of profound happiness. She loved him with all her force and soul, her poor, infirm soul, and with all her heart, the poor heart of a grateful beast.

"It was a picture of admirable and innocent passion, nevertheless pure and modest, such as Nature had put in souls before man complicated and disfigured it with all shades and changes of sentiment. But alas! the husband soon wearied of this beautiful, ardent and mute creature. His days began to be spent away from her. She began to suffer. She waited for him from morning till night, her eyes on the clock, and thinking no more of the meals, for now he ate always from home, at Clermont, Chatel-Guyon, Royal, no matter where, in order not to return.

"She grew thin. All other thought, desire, expectation or confused hope fled from her mind, and the hours when she did not see him became for her a time of cruelest torture. Soon he slept from home and returned only at daybreak. She would never go to bed till he had come, but sat motionless on a chair, her eyes on the little brass clock hands, turning and turning always in their slow regular march around the dial with its tell-tale numbers. She heard the trot of his horse away down in the valley, sprang up with a bound, and then, when he came, turned with a gesture of a ghost to the clock, as if to say: 'See how late it is!' And he, beginning to be afraid of this loving jealous idiot, grew fretted, as brutes do; and one night he struck her.

"They ran for me. She was struggling and howling in a horrible attack of sorrow, anger, passion, I know not which, for who can divine what is passing in these rudimentary brains? I calmed her with morphine and forbade her seeing this man again, for I comprehended that marriage was infallibly leading her to death. Then she became mad. Yes, my friend, that idiot became truly mad. She thought of him always and awaited him always, day or night, sleeping or waking.

"As I saw her emaciating and pining, and as her obstinate regard never quitted the clocks, I had taken from the house every apparatus for the measurement of time. I took from her thus the possibility of counting; of counting the hours and of ceaselessly seeking in obscure recollections what moment he had formerly returned. I hoped at last to kill memory in her, and to extinguish that flame of thought that I had lighted with so much trouble.

"I have not succeeded. The other day I tried an experiment. I gave her my watch. She took it, considered it some time, then began to wait in a lamentable fashion, as if the sight of that little instrument had suddenly reawakened the memory that had begun to be dulled. She is thinner to-day than ever, with great hollow, brilliant eyes and a restlessness of nerves and body that keeps her pacing, pacing, back and forth like a caged tigress.

"I have had the windows barred, high shutters put to the glasses, and all the chairs screwed to the floor to keep her from looking into the street to see if he is returning. Ah! the poor parents; what a life they have passed."

* * * * *

We had arrived now on the hill.

"See," said the Doctor, facing about. "Look at Riom from here."

The gloomy old town had the air of an ancient, dead city. Behind us, as far as the eye could reach, stretched a green, wooded plain, dotted with villages and towns, wrapped in a blue vapourish mist that reached to the sky line; while to the right, clear to the horizon, ran a chain of round-topped knobs and mountains.

The Doctor still talked of the country and the summits and the history of this or that one. But I did not listen; I was thinking, thinking only of that poor mad girl, seeing only her; she seemed to hover, like a sorrowful spirit, over all that vast country.

I demanded brusquely:

"And the husband—what has become of him?"

"He lives at Royal on the income they allow him. He is happy and free."

Saddened a little and silent, both of us, we turned to go back. Just then an English T-cart, which had come up behind us, passed rapidly, drawn by a thorough bred. The Doctor clutched my arm.

"There," said he, "there he goes now—Du Bois."

And I saw a wide-brimmed grey felt, tipped over the ear, and beneath it two broad shoulders disappearing in a cloud of dust.

Le Vier.

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Key to Jumble Story Competition.—No. 1.]

BESSIE.

"You'll come again to-morrow?"

"I can't, besides——"

"Besides what?" curiously.

"You know, Dick, well enough," and the woman turned away.

The man kicked a stone viciously.

"Just once more," he pleaded; "I shall be going away soon now."

"Yes," replied the woman sadly, "and I shall be glad when you have gone. I can't help it, but I know that to meet you like this is very, very wrong."

"Rot!" the man ejaculated.

"No it is not rot, Dick, but I will try and come just *once* more."

She stood facing him now, a little thing with soft, fair hair clustering round her almost childish face.

He was so tall that he had to bend to look into those wistful, upturned eyes.

He took her little face between his hands and kissed it.

A man with hair streaked with grey, and a slight stoop, passed them; he half paused, then hurried on swiftly.

They did not see him; they were looking at each other.

"Let me go, I shall be so late."

"Then promise to come to-morrow?"

"If I can."

"I shall expect you. Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, Dick."

* * * * *

A man and his wife were sitting in the drawing-room, while the late autumn sun flooded the room with colour as it slowly set.

He was reading the paper and smoking his beloved pipe.

She was working, and her thoughts kept time to her stitches.

"How dreadfully old he is looking to-night"—stitch, stitch.

"What ages we have been married"—stitch, stitch—"more like thirteen years than three"—stitch, stitch—and she sighed.

The man (he was not so very old either) laid down his paper, and looked at her, opened his mouth to speak, but stopped, and took up his paper again.

"Why didn't we meet three years ago?" A pause. "I wonder why I married *him?*" Stitch, stitch, stitch—angrily now.

"How he stoops! Always poring over those musty old books, I suppose"—stitch, stitch. "I don't think he stooped like that three years ago. I wonder——" She laid down her work and closed her eyes.

The man smoked furiously.

"I am going out shooting to-morrow," he said.

"Shooting!" She sat up and looked at him. "I didn't know you cared about it."

"One must have a change," shortly.

"A change; perhaps he was weary too!"

"You look tired; you had better go to bed. I must see to my gun and things; I shall be very late to-night."

He went into the library and locked the door; then he took a large parchment document out of his desk, and read it over.

After that he began to write. Sheet after sheet of notepaper he covered, pausing at length to look at his wife's portrait which smiled down at him over his table.

"No, no," he muttered, "better not," and he threw the paper on the fire and watched it burn and smoulder away. Then he took a fresh sheet and wrote five words on it, and placed it with the parchment in a drawer.

A clock chimed three a.m. The man did not heed it but sat smoking. At last, as daylight dawned, he took up his gun and examined it.

A hurried pretence of breakfast in the grey morning light, then he stole up to his wife's room. She was sleeping peacefully.

"Bessie," he said softly.

She opened her blue eyes bewildered.

"You are up very early," she said.

"It will be late when I come home; I want you to kiss me, dear."

She looked at him astonished.

He did not often ask for kisses *now*.

The man took her little arms and placed them round his neck, and held her close to him.

"Bessie, dear," he said, "I have not made you very happy, but I am going to try and make you happier."

Then he kissed her and went downstairs.

* * * * *

It was a long sunny day, the late roses were heavy with perfume, and the birds sang unceasingly.

At the gate, by the cornfield, the man and woman met. She was very white; they were to say good-bye. She meant never to see him again.

The sun had set when she went slowly home. The house was dark and still; she was, oh! so glad she could not talk just yet, and the light would hurt her eyes.

Going into the library she sat down.

Oh! how she longed for a change. If only she could go away for a little time, it would be easier to bear then.

Yes, she would write to those friends up North, that would be far away.

The woman lit a lamp and searched for some notepaper.

She could not find any, she knew there had been some yesterday.

She opened a drawer. A folded parchment document, and on the top a sheet of paper. There was a sudden commotion in the hall; he was coming home; she must get the letter written quickly; she seized the sheet of paper.

A knock at the door.

"You are wanted at once," said a strange voice. A sudden fear struck her. Still holding the paper in her fingers, she followed the man out into the hall.

On a stretcher lay her husband, dead. He had accidentally shot himself.

Bessie glanced mechanically at the paper which she still held. On it was written:

"God bless you, my darling."

Mary West.

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We sat together in the verandah at Shepheard's Hotel. Cairo lay beneath and around us—Cairo, filthy, multi-coloured, malodorous, but always picturesque. Suddenly an Arab came round the corner, and, with a salaam of the deepest, handed some letters to Grimshaw. Then he squatted down on the verandah boards, with his great black eyes fixed on my companion's face, waiting for further orders.

"Your boy, Captain?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Grimshaw; "but a good deal more than that: I should be buried in the Soudan now if it were not for Ibrahim yonder."

"Tell me about it, please," I said rather eagerly, for this small Arab in the clean, white tunic and brilliant turban interested me mightily.

Grimshaw settled himself back in his bungalow chair and began:

"You know, of course," he said, "that I was in Khartoum with Gordon. I did not regularly belong to the General's forces, but I had volunteered as one of his aides-de-camp. Well, we were shut up in that death-trap city Khartoum, surrounded upon every side by the forces of the Mahdi—myriads of fanatical Soudanese Arabs following that high priest of bloodshed.

"We English were but a mere handful of men; the auxiliary forces were wretchedly small. Our only hope was aid from Egypt, and, as the whole world knows, that never came. Poor Gordon was allowed to fall a victim to the Mahdi's sword, and most of the garrison were slain. With the exception of Slatin Bey, who became a Mussulman, I think, I was the only European who got out of the doomed city with my life. That I did so is due to Ibrahim."

Here the Arab boy—on hearing his name mentioned—looked up and smiled, showing a row of teeth exceptionally even and white.

"A few days after we entered Khartoum," continued Grimshaw, "I was patrolling the town under General Gordon's orders, when we came across a great rabble of boys, hallooing and shouting at a deafening rate. I sent an Egyptian soldier to discover the cause, and he reported that the young 'fuzzy-wuzzies' (it is so that Private Atkins of her Majesty's troops denominates the Soudanese) were 'having fun' with one of their number. I was then, as now, intensely interested in native manners and customs. Halting my men I entered the boisterous cordon of boys to determine the reason of the tumult.

"The little rascals were teasing one of their number. 'Teasing,' indeed, in this case, is too mild a word. They were beating and stoning the lad, who lay bruised and half blinded in the gutter. His turban was off, and his already scant clothing had been torn to shreds. I sprang into the middle of the mob, and demanded the cause of such brutal treatment. At first they affected not to understand my Arabic, and went on beating their victim; but when I had soundly cuffed one or two and summoned my interpreter to my aid, I succeeded in making them answer.

"'He is the renegade's son,' said a ringleader—'Hassan the renegade's son. Stone him, in the name of the prophet.'

"Then I understood. The poor boy's father had taken service with Gordon, leaving his offspring to suffer all the cruelties which the Khartoum children, egged on by their elders, were sure to inflict upon him. I lost no time in calling up a few men, and sending that pack of youthful fanatics to the right about. They went away, vowing dire vengeance on the 'renegade's brat,' and I raised my *protégé* from the dust. He had fainted from pain and loss of blood; but one of our surgeons soon brought him to. When he opened his eyes and saw me, he smiled like a coffee-coloured angel, and wanted there and then to give me his best salaam. Of course I made him lie down again; but he blurted out his gratitude for

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preservation so vigorously that he became near fainting again.

"Next day his father, Hassan, one of Gordon's servants, came to see him. The two had a long talk, and finally Hassan announced that, for his son's sake, he had decided to leave the General and go back to the cobbler's stall in the bazaar. Ibrahim—for the lad whom I had helped to rescue was the same one now sitting before you—soon recovered, thanks to his native tough constitution. He left my hut, absolutely refusing to touch any of the money which I offered him.

"'Protector of the poor,' he said in his quaint, grandiloquent eastern way, 'you have saved your servant's life. Did not the mouse once repay the lion that had been his benefactor? Lo! I am the mouse, effendi, and you are the lion. Perhaps, some day, I may repay you. Salaam, friend!' Then he backed out of my hut; and I did not see him again for many days.

* * * * *

"One evening, while hurrying through the bazaar on my way to General Gordon's quarters, a boy sprang out of a cobbler's stall and handed me a tiny bundle—I had no time to more than recognise him as Ibrahim, son of Hassan. I carried the bundle to the General, and together we undid the fastenings. Have you ever deciphered an Oriental object letter? I mean a letter which is not written upon paper, but of which the sense is conveyed by objects—flowers and the like. The bundle handed to me by Ibrahim was just such a communication. It contained a queer collection of articles. They were: a piece of broken knife blade; a scrap of green cloth; two flowers (marigolds, I think) with only the head remaining; a brick from the walls; and, lastly, an iron affair, which I at once recognised as the point of one of those sticks with which camels are urged onwards.

"General Gordon lost no time in unravelling the mystery of this missive.

"'The Green Cloth,' he said, 'means the Mahdi; because his sacred flag is green. The knife blade stands for a sword; and the decapitated flowers mean that our heads are going to be cut off. The brick, I take it, hints of treachery inside the walls. The camel-spike advises you to fly from Khartoum immediately. Where did you get this?'

"When I told him the source of my information he was inclined to pooh-pooh Ibrahim's letter. 'It is a boy's fear and fancy,' he said. 'We shall be relieved in a few weeks.'

"But the Mahdi's men formed an impenetrable circle round the town—a circle that grew ever narrower and narrower. Day after day we scanned the desert horizon for some sign of the expected relief, but without avail. Day after day the impression grew stronger upon each and all of us that we were doomed.

"During an early morning walk, Ibrahim accosted me as suddenly as he had done before. This time he carried no object-letter.

"'Fly, effendi,' he whispered. 'The city is betrayed. My father and other Mussulmans have decided to let the Mahdi within the gates. Disguise yourself and fly before it is too late.'

"I shook my head, for duty kept me in Khartoum; and Ibrahim retreated with tears in those big, honest eyes of his.

* * * * *

"The very next night his warning was fulfilled. It would be idle, my friend, to tell you over again all the horrors of the capture, or rather betrayal, of Khartoum. The Mahdi soldiers were like fiends incarnate. Spent with fatigue and slender fare, we could not stand before them. Gordon, poor fellow, was slain; and a remnant of us were driven fighting for life from hut to hut, across the city. Finally, with empty revolver and broken sword, I found myself in the stairway of a rude minaret, waiting for the death which I felt to be inevitable. It is all very well to meet death boldly on the field of battle, with comrades and friends around one, but to sit down in a dark stairway and count the minutes until its coming, might make the bravest man in the world feel uncomfortable. All around I heard the hideous sounds of slaughter, and watched through a tiny loop-hole the wall of red flames shooting across the sky (for it was midnight, and a starless midnight to boot). A sick feeling stole over me. To remain cooped up thus seemed intolerable. I had just resolved to rush into the thick of the Soudanese and sell my life as dearly as possible, when a footfall on the stairs below arrested me.

"It was the sound of a naked foot; and as I peered, every sense on the alert, into the half-light of the minaret doorway, I vaguely distinguished a dark form and two shining eyes. Was it one of the Mahdi's warriors in search of human prey? I gripped my broken sword tighter, and prepared for action.

"'Effendi!' whispered a voice, 'is it you, protector of the poor?'

"The voice was that of Ibrahim, son of Hassan. My heart gave a leap for gladness, and I answered him that it was indeed myself.

"'It is good,' he exclaimed. 'My lord, I have come to save you. Hasten down, and don these garments which I have brought you. They belong to the old blind priest who lodged with my father. He died last night, but nobody knows of it yet. You can pass as the old priest and escape; make haste, Sahib, make haste!'

"I saw the chance, and seized it. Before you could have repeated the proverbial 'Jack Robinson' many times, I had pulled those baggy Mohammedan clothes over my soiled and bloodstained uniform. A turban took the place of my Khadi helmet, and around my face I draped the white hood which the Soudanese Arabs wear. Then, before I could protest, Ibrahim coolly seized a handful of mud and liberally daubed my face.

"'The Sahib is too white,' he explained. 'The old blind priest was always dirty and black—so kick off your boots, Sahib, and let me daub your feet.' Off went my boots, and in a minute or two my legs, from the knee down, were as brown (and as dirty) as they well might be.

"'You are all right now, effendi,' said Ibrahim; 'let me make for the Cairo gate.'

"With all my heart I thanked the boy; but he would listen to no thanks. 'You saved my life; I'll save yours,' he said. 'Remember, effendi, the mouse and the lion. Let us hasten to the gate.'

"'But you are not coming,' I began, when my protest was interrupted by a troop of black Mahdists surging into the little bye-street where we stood. Never shall I forget the sight they presented, in the false light of the burning city, with their huge piles of hair, their ferocious faces, and their spears and scimitars dripping with blood. I had given myself over for lost, when Ibrahim gripped my hand, led me onward, calling in sing-song tones: 'Make room for the blind priest. Room for Amed, son of Ali, the soothsayer. The light of Allah is upon the blind priest.'

"Taking the hint, I plucked up courage enough to shout the war-cry of the Mahdi. The fuzzy-wuzzies,

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entirely deceived, joined in my cry. 'Bide your time, holy father,' said one of them; 'we'll give you plenty of Christian heads later on.'

"Then they left us, whooping like demons down the street. But Ibrahim plucked at my sleeves, and mechanically I followed him. Many times we met such

"A camel for the Mahdi's messenger!"

parties of the Mahdists, but in the darkness our ruse succeeded beautifully, and we reached the Cairo gate in safety.

"Around the gate, despite the confusion, a strong guard had been posted. In the open space without, many scores of camels were sprawling.

"'A camel for the Mahdi's messenger!' cried Ibrahim in his shrill voice. 'Ho, brothers! A camel for the blind soothsayer, Amed, son of Ali, who bears the Mahdi's defiance across the desert.'

"A dozen dusky warriors surrounded us; and as many awkward camels were prodded to their feet. One of these ungainly beasts was made to kneel, while Ibrahim made a great show of helping the supposed blind priest to a seat upon its back.

"Just then a tall fuzzy-wuzzy—clearly an officer—rushed forward. 'Who is this?' he demanded. 'Where does this man go? The orders are that none shall leave the gates before daybreak.'

"My heart sank, but, fortunately for us, the natural

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superstition of the Arabs came to our aid. 'Have a care!' cried one of the soldiers. 'It is a blind priest—a soothsayer. He may curse you.' The officer stepped back involuntarily, eyeing me with fear. 'Give us your blessing, holy father,' chorused a dozen onlookers.

"Here was a new predicament. I could not remember

Speeding fast from the gory city.

enough Arabic at the moment to give the desired blessing; but a whisper from Ibrahim recalled to my mind a simple form of words, which, eked out by discreet mumbling on my part, and the loud responses of the boy, suited the Arabs well enough. They prostrated themselves—the officer with the rest, amid a great cry of 'Allah Ackbar.' Then Ibrahim smote our camel soundly, and away we went, through the outposts, speeding fast from the gory city of Khartoum.

* * * * *

"The perils and adventures of that journey were too numerous to be told at one sitting; but it was nearly a month after that awful night that our camel limped into Cairo, carrying on its back two emaciated fugitives who had once been an officer of the line and an Arab boy.

"Ibrahim has been all round the world with me since, and will probably continue to be my comrade until one of us twain departs this life for ever—eh, Ibrahim, old friend?"

The Arab lad smiled, and spread out his hands. "My fate is thine, effendi," he said. "You saved my life."

"On that score, Ibrahim," answered Captain Grimshaw. "I think we are quits. Remember Khartoum."

Gerald Brenan.

Jumble Story Competition.

(No. 4.)

SEE OPPOSITE PAGE ☞

Six Prizes, one of £5 and five of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the opposite page, in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, and the first line is in its correct position, but the title and signature are jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumble Story."

All competitions to be in by Monday, July 27th.

JUMBLE STORY.

Result of No. 1.

The Key appears on page 108.

That this new form of competition is likely to prove more popular than any yet started in *Short Stories* during its existence is proved by the enormous number of attempts received at this office in the first competition. Several readers succeeded in putting the story together within a few lines of its correct form, and the ingenuity displayed by the vast majority of those who competed was surprising. The £2 has been awarded to Miss B. Clifton, 46, North Side, Clapham Common, S.W.; £1 to Miss Nellie Ottewell, 29, Branston Road, Burton-on-Trent; £1 to C. Wilkins, 2, Claremont Villas, Tudor Road, Kingston Hill; and £1 to F. B. Roberts, 30, Durley Road, Stamford Hill, N. Consolation prizes in the form of pencil-cases have been sent to:

Mrs. Young, 319, Crystal Palace Road, East Dulwich.
F. Dix, Bradwell, via Sheffield.
W. W. Smee, 73, Benthal Road, Stoke Newington.
E. M. Atkins, Ben Nevis Cottage, near Fort William, N.B.
Miss E. M. Hilder, 77, Stormont Road, Clapham Common.
Miss M. Hunt, 41, Palace Street, Canterbury.
Miss E. Marshall, Kingston-by-Sea, Brighton.
E. Lloyd, 14, St. Mary's Square, Paddington.
Mrs. W. G. Ayers, Winchester Villa, 86, Birkbeck Road, Leytonstone.
G. D. Taylor, 28, Ernest Street, Rhyl.
Mrs. A. Cunnington, 86, West End Lane, West Hampstead.
R. Bedford, 99, Halton Road, Islington.
G. Shipley, 90, Manningham Lane, Bradford, Yorks.
Mrs. Wilson, 13, Rydal Avenue, Central Drive, Blackpool.
Miss G. Trotter, c.o. Mrs. Pendred, Crohill, Pendennis Road, Streatham.
Miss A. E. Gardiner, 2, Montpelier, Bath, Somerset.
Miss A. Mawdsley, Bystock House, St. David's, Exeter.
C. A. Young, 319, Crystal Palace Road, East Dulwich.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 1.

Of the several hundreds of experiences sent in for this competition, the following, forwarded by Mr. John Beveridge, of 3, Fishmonger Alley, Fenchurch Street, E.C., has been selected as the best. A penknife has been awarded to Mr. David Beveridge, of the same address, who attested to the truth of the statement.

I am not likely to forget what occurred when I received my first salary, as it is often made the subject of a joke against me in our family. I was barely thirteen years old, and the sum of 4s. a week (which I started with) seemed quite a lot of money. On the Saturday afternoon that I first received it, I had made arrangements to meet a girl that lived a few doors from me, and felt quite manly as we got a steamer up to Richmond, where, after a walk, I paid for tea and various other little expenses until she said it was time she was getting home. Then the thought struck me about money for the return journey, which I had forgotten all about, and when I counted up my remaining cash found it amounted to 2½d. My pride had a great fall as I explained the matter to the girl, who immediately turned as cross as possible and said she had no money with her, so we got on a 'bus as far as they would take us for the twopence, then started to walk home, a distance of about eight miles, and when we arrived her mother told me I ought to be ashamed keeping her daughter out so late. And ever after that I dreaded the sight of that girl as much as people do the tax-collector.

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JUMBLED STORY. No. 4.]

HER TRELLVE TOES.

"I WILL not give you back your letters," said he.

But I must have my letters back, and that night as I walked straight to the wardrobe and drew the curtain up and saw me and opened the door herself.

There was a wardrobe cupboard with curtains before the key in the lock.

Then a key rattled in the lock, and I did the only little package of "legal cap," and pens, and inkstand, on the mantelpiece?

Sally was a girl you could trust. She was a plain brute!—"you'll find a better girl in no time."

Ben—I mean Mr. Howard; he was Ben to me no Mr. Javerell, because he is engaged to my Aunt Ophelia, and now I intended to tell her the facts of the case and keep it to lend the lodgers when they lose their key-money. Secondly, I—I—only meant to tiff a little—not need and meet me at the station."

I knew that Ben—I mean Mr. Howard—was out by his room.

Then Henry walked away, and Ben—yes, Ben, my pipes.

"Ben," said the strange person, "you are not looking what belongs to me. And you will, won't you?"

"Oh, my dear," he answered, "you cannot have all the rings. Now, I shall lock you in and sit on the stairs to to-day my dearest friend, and the only one who knows the stairs.

"We were engaged to each other," said Ben, "and I will be getting things ready for dinner, and Sarah kissed them, and took down my photograph and kissed you exactly at four."

I drew a chair to the desk, sat down, and turned a cigar box.

"There is but one woman in the world for me," said Howard."

And cold shivers ran up my back when Sally unlocks all the drawers and desks in the house. We heard the street door open and bang shut and feet ascend and look for my letters.

"And I want you to help me to get them, Sally," I said I.

"Ah, whatever you please, Miss Travis. I suppose I'll hide it from the world, and you will never speak of fool, Henry.

"It is a splendid idea," said Sally. "You'll have to buy those things for my wife, and you pack up what you wouldn't tell another fellow, but I believe my heart is all. She's a mercenary little wretch, but I—I am a window, and Sally, who was making a cherry pie, looked horrible Mr. Henry. "Now, you'll come up and spend eight o'clock, and at nine I tapped on the basement to break off, only to frighten you. Thirdly, I—I—oh, poor Ben—took a bundle of letters from his bosom and back.

And then and there I sat down and told her all about the fact that my grandfather did not leave me his own letters."

"You'll not have any trouble in six months," said the Ben. "There now, I've done. You know my trouble. that you are not engaged to me any longer, Mr. moment.

"But you have no right to keep them," said I, "now I've found out that you really truly love me, Ben—and unlocked the door and we were really in the room—by another man.

"I'm feeling wretchedly," said Mr. Howard. "I keep watch, though nothing can happen. I'll come for they are. Good-bye, Miss Travis."

"Gentlemen don't talk of law; they think of honour," and a blotting-pad.

They shut the door and sat down. They lit their correspondence. I always kept the rough draft of mine, but just as good as gold. I had told her everything, possible thing to avoid discovery—at least for a little thing, with something the matter with her spine, and he never wanted me. I came to get my letters, but loved her better than my life, and I thought she was longer—lived with Sally Grey's mother.

"I suppose he keeps the letters in his desk," said she. And I was about to try my key on the drawers when I said. "To let me get into Mr. Howard's room and take lunch, darling."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said this Mr. Henry—heartless and there's no law in the land to make me give up my property has a good deal to do with things being as well."

"I love her still. I shall keep her photograph all my life—and her letters to read and kiss—I would not give that, and then, having pulled a bag from the corner, he sat up in bed I thought of the way to do it.

There was nothing inside but some notepaper, an l a broken—there, don't laugh. You see that photograph rubbing the forks and glasses. I'll get the pass key—of advantage! You have jilted me, and you can say what very fond of me. But you know how grandfather cut it. I ran towards it and stood bolt upright in the I—well there I was—it was not a situation to impart it to anyone, I know."

"Oh, dear," I thought, "where can I look now?" corner as Ben—I mean Mr. Howard—entered, followed them up."

"It is only me in the flesh, Ben," I said. "I wish I was wait until lunch is over, and Miss Peck and Mrs. Jones call upon her, and she picked a quarrel with me—that's me out of his will, and then a rich old fellow began to go out. Then mother will lie down for a nap, and Biddy you may keep them. I—I've misunderstood you, and love you very much—and I couldn't be going to marry old how Ben and I came to make up our quarrel.

I shut the desk and looked in the drawer. There was a ghost so that I could vanish. And now you can boast though we part for ever, forgive me, Ben."

"Is it her ghost?" I heard him say to himself, and all your life, if you like—and I will say something. Firstly, I did not care about your grandfather's horrid dignity.

And Sally was my bridesmaid when I married, and is your holiday with me, won't you? I'll just step out and though it is broken off—I—I want to know—I used to get her to let me go into Ben's room while he was away "I know he doesn't put them in his trunk, but this key you please, and I can prove the truth by our course we have one for every room. Now, do stay for it and about the letters.

The next moment he was staring at me and I at him.

SUSAN JEMREM.

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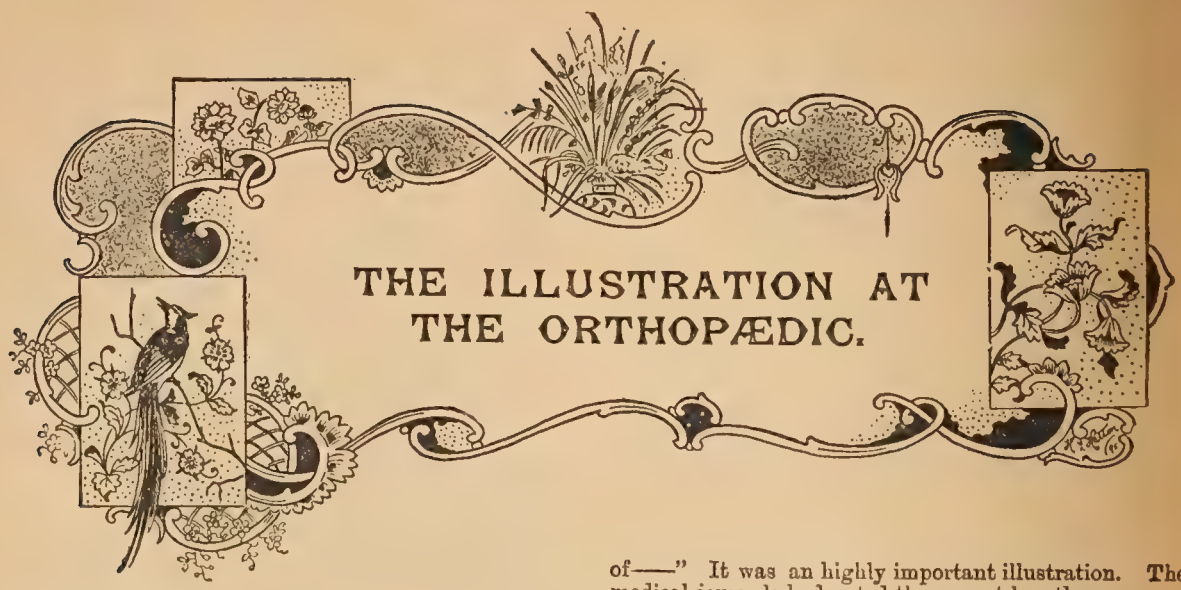

THE ILLUSTRATION AT THE ORTHOPÆDIC.

The young person in question was, I should think, about four years old, and she held, on the occasion of which I speak, the undivided attention of some twenty young gentlemen and even of a couple of older gentlemen of scientific aims. She was not so very important a young person, either, being a charity patient at a famous hospital where little ones of deformed limbs are treated. Yet, perhaps, she was not so very poor a little girl, because there were two red ribbons tying up her brown hair, and quite a wide frill of lace about the neck of her plaid dress.

Her mother carried her into the lecture-room and placed her upon a high table, and then left her to dangle her little bare legs until the lecturer should be ready to use her as an illustration.

The young person gazed thoughtfully about the room, at the odd instruments behind her and the students in front. Neither proved of sufficient interest to retain her gaze, and she presently devoted her attention to her mother, the nurses, and a few other pitiful ones in an adjoining room, who were playing unconcernedly amid surroundings which might have saddened them had they been older.

The lecture was vividly interesting, and the students looked at the little maid as they had, perhaps, looked at numerous other little maids with red bows and big brown eyes, as merely a convenient deformity that made the lecturer's words easier to understand. They were not a particularly pleasant looking lot of young men. Their clothes fitted badly, and it was obvious that their paths had been rural and their bringing up uncareful. Our little girl, although she certainly could not have told why, was not approving of them. She looked them over, as an older person looks at a monotonous landscape, with an eye open for possible beauty.

"You see, gentlemen," the lecturer went on, "the exactly opposite set of conditions occur in these two cases. In the boy's there is *talipes varus*, that is, the foot curves inwards; in the girl"—the child looked gravely down upon him as he took her little leg gently into his hand and moved it upward—"here is *talipes valgus*, the foot curves outwards." The class bent forward. "In this, however, an abnormal development of——" It was an highly important illustration. The medical journals had noted the case at length.

Only one man in the room was looking elsewhere than at the piteously twisted limb in the doctor's hand. There was a look about the child's little mouth which reminded him of someone whom he should see within a couple of hours. They would dine together. This was her birthday. He would give her the sweets he had chosen with such care and which he had now in his pocket. He could see her delight over the unexpected revelations in the box. It certainly would be the first time she had been presented with her own initials on each sweet. Then the tongs with tiny golf-drivers for claws, and the filagree paper perfumed with wood-violet, and the criss-crossing of violet baby-ribbon over the mauve and white confections. The *bonbonnière* was of silver with a pretty lid. It was a love of a box and he felt justly proud of it. The lecture was good, of course, but he should be glad when it was over.

A bored sigh from the little maid echoed his wish. She was looking dully about the room again, and presently her big brown eyes lit upon the young man who leant back while the others leant forward, and who looked upon her with friendly eyes while the others examined her feet. She returned his glance with grave scrutiny. He pleased her. He was good to look upon. He had a flower in his coat. Clearly this was something she did not expect among this crowd of ugly men. The little maid was unconsciously realising the difference between a good-looking chap, with a good tailor and an eye for ties, and the student who is too absorbed to care what he has on.

They looked steadily at each other, the young fellow with a smile on his lips, and the child with pleased appreciation dawning in her eyes. Suddenly she smiled also. Then she laughed aloud.

"Pretty man," she chuckled, pointing with her chubby forefinger at the well-groomed youth.

There was a roar from the class and the young fellow blushed a fiery red at the honours thrust upon him. The man next him grinned.

The lecturer, with a smile, proceeded to the boy's case. The girl felt her foot free and extended her arm to the class.

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"I want to go to him," she cried, her lips quivering with excitement.

"Hush, dear," said the nurse reprovingly. But the child persisted.

"Take me down," she begged, with her eyes fixed on Leggatt.

He shook his head smilingly at her, and turned his face resolutely towards the lecturer. In a second or so, in spite of himself, he stole a glimpse at the child. She was still seated at the table, dangling her poor little legs, with her arms pleadingly extended and with great tears gathering in her eyes.

Young Leggatt moved uneasily, tried to look away, uttered a forcible exclamation under his breath, and then, finally, with an impulse he could not control, dashed out of his seat to the front of the room and took the now sobbing child in his arms.

The lecturer frowned—it was his duty to frown—then turned his back so that he was not supposed to know what was going on. The young fellow retired with the little girl to the end of the hall and sat down, taking her upon his knee. The nurse hovered near. The little girl's eyes danced. She smiled up at the handsome youth while he was wiping her tears away. Then she proceeded to have one of the best times in her poor little life. She found out why his hair was parted in the middle, and why he wore a pin. She played with his watch and traced his initials on its back. She learnt how to make rabbits out of handkerchiefs, and elicited his admiration of her own new one with the blue flower in the border. His pockets revealed unknown treasures. She made hieroglyphics on his ivory tablets with a silver pencil. So far there was mutual enjoyment.

It was when she was going through his last pocket that she unluckily chanced on the *bonbonnière*. The outside box was tied with pretty pink string. She wanted the string. The young man gave it to her. Naturally, then, she opened the box to see what was inside. This had not been the programme. Inside was another box. How funny! The second box was glittering. Funnier still! Perhaps it would open also. Just at this juncture young Leggatt had his attention distracted for one perilous moment, and when he came back to his play with the little maid he received an unpleasant shock.

She had opened the silver lid and was gazing in an ecstasy of delight at the sweets and ribbons within. With a feminine intuition she recognised the contents, although she could never have seen anything similar. She looked up at him gaily, as if it had been a game and she had found the handkerchief.

"Sweets," she cried joyfully.

"Yes," said the miserable but truthful young man. Then she generously offered him one. He seized the opportunity and took the box from her.

"See," he said, wishing he had never been born, "pretty box shuts. Now, wrap it up. Put it away," and he slipped it into his pocket. Her face looked grieved wonderment at him, and he weakly added: "Hunt for it again."

She looked doubtfully at him for a minute while he basely tried to divert her attention. He pointed out the big clock beside him and the interesting fact that the pendulum swung all night and day. But the little maid, not being of the sex which is concerned with the insides of machines, gave the most cursory glance at the clock and began an instant search for the fascinating sweets.

The young fellow groaned within himself. If it were an ordinary box the poor little thing would be welcome to it. But this especially ordered one, with her initials on each sweet, the precious tongs and box with her monogram on its lid! There was no time to get anything else for her. In less than an hour he would be at her birthday dinner. Why had he been such an idiot as not to have sent it by post? To let himself into this scrape just because he was beguiled into wanting to give it into her hands himself, and see her radiant face. And if he let her birthday go by without a reminder, she might indeed be hurt. Perhaps she would say "No," when so careless a lover asked her to marry him. Then that fellow, Rowley—no doubt his present was already received. He had been so cock sure of being able to knock Rowley out with the daintiness and appropriateness of his own gift. Rowley would never have thought of anything so novel. Hang it all, the youngster should not have these sweets. He would buy her a couple of boxes to-morrow and send them to her.

A sudden shuffling of feet warned him that the lecture had ceased. He looked down at the child. She had found the box and was preparing to open it again.

"I must go, little one," he said. "I will bring you two boxes of sweets to-morrow. Let me have this one."

But she clung to it.

"No, baby keep it," she said forlornly.

It was the note in her voice that told how accustomed she was to having things taken from her, that went to young Leggatt's heart. He tried, miserably, to detach her little fingers. But she held tight and the tears began to come into her eyes. With a quick ejaculation he desisted from his half-hearted task. They looked at each other for a second in silence, the baby girl, the tears running down her cheeks, a pitiful quiver on her lips, the man with a struggle in his face. She held the box close in both small hands. Suddenly he beckoned to the nurse.

"Will you take this little girl?" he asked gently, kissing the child good-bye. "There are a few sweeties here," touching the box, "I hope you will allow her to keep them."

And he hurried out of the door.

He outstayed the others after the dinner party. The girl continued a conversation. "It was not kind of Mr. Rowley," she said, "to embarrass me by giving me such an expensive gift. A few flowers one likes. But a gold-lined box with my monogram on it, even if the value of it were disguised by filling it up with sweets! Why, even the sweets had my initials on them. It was execrably bad taste."

The young fellow pondered within himself. Had he any right to sail under false colours? Why not? But as the girl fixed her clear eyes upon him, he involuntarily told the truth. It was a bold narrative, and meant simply to honestly emphasise the fact that he had been guilty of the same bad form as had Rowley, and therefore deserving of no better treatment.

But somehow when he finished—though why should what was execrable taste in Rowley be thought a touching kindness in Leggatt—there were tears in the girl's eyes, and she extended her hand.

"You will go and see the little thing again," she said softly, "and I—I—should like to go with you."

"Always?" ventured the young fellow, his heart beating painfully.

He kissed her hand. Then he looked down into her eyes, and then—he kissed her lips.

Madge Robertson.

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He was a poor clerk, without high aspirations, commonplace, ungainly, living valiantly, and inexperienced in deep emotion.

She was plain, dependent, badly informed, unattractive, and she lived because living seemed the custom. Neither had ever been in love—they had never gone beyond vague dreams of what love, marriage and a home, such as they saw all around them, might mean in their own lives.

And when they one day fell in love with each other both were surprised beyond measure—he that any woman could find him lovable; she that any man could deem her attractive. There came another surprise in the sweetness of the experience—the having of a sacred little world of their own, apart from the great swirling world around them, and the cosy sympathy, the timid confidences, the bashful caresses, the tenderness that came into their hearts, and the wider and brighter aspect of the world, that before had seemed so far removed.

After the first of the love-making had passed, and they had adjusted themselves somewhat to their new condition, and had found life broad and wholesome, the differences between them began to come into evidence.

Each magnified, beyond all reason, the goodness and charms of the other—to him she was an angel, a faithful devoted heart; to her he was a deity, an unspeakable blessing which God in His infinite goodness had sent into her dreary life. He loved her, she worshipped him; and that is the old, old story.

If she paid more careful attention to her appearance, it was to be pretty for *his* sake; if he was more careful in his dress and manner, it was because of that higher respect for himself which her love had inculcated in him. She lived for him only; he for himself—and her. To her it was all a beautiful dream, to him, an awakening. It inspired him with ambition, her only with devotion. With her, dull earth had dropped away and radiant heaven had opened; with him earth remained, but had lost its dullness and had become shining and pleasant. She would have died for him; he would have preferred to live to make her happy and to enjoy himself the good which had come to him. And all this is merely the old, old story.

Surely he could not have been after all, so inferior as he had deemed himself before her love came into his life. He reflected that he had been under-estimating himself, and that if so good and sensible and loyal and tender a soul as she could find admirable qualities in him, such qualities must exist and be patent to the world. Thus grew his pride, and then his vanity. It was as grateful to his self-love as it was to her devotion, to humble herself before him, to look up to him, to hang upon his words, to repose her heart, her life, wholly in his keeping, to be eager to serve him, to renounce everything for his sake. In every way she encouraged him to take her life into his hands and make of it whatsoever he would.

The discovery of a self-surrender so complete, of a devotion so unrestrained, warmed the marrow in his bones. His spirit expanded, and the strength of a giant entered his soul. So much deeper and stronger than she did he come to feel—did she make him feel—that he began to regard her as a tender creature placed under his guidance—a frail, helpless, homeless dove, whom he must cherish, watch tenderly, and direct in the ways of his choice.

Thus it came about that he began to criticise her now and then, suggest changes here and improvements there; and she accepted these petty tyrannies as special blessing, and gloated over them, and trained her manner to accord with them, and deemed herself the most fortunate of all the girls to whom the great God in heaven had sent the priceless blessing of a good man's love. And all this, too, is only the old, old, story.

They were married at last. The world was very sweet and tender and beautiful in those rosy young days; and even poverty could not throw a mist over the morning of their lives. For was he not advancing in material ways at a pace which surprised the commonplace associates who, before *she* came into his life, had known him as a commonplace man like themselves. He even looked forward to the time when he might be rich

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and influential, when he would be spoken of as a *self*-made man, who, through sheer force of innate superiority had broken down the barriers which confine ordinary men, and had escaped into prosperity! How she pinched and patched and saved and contrived and planned! How able and shrewd she was in her suggestions, and how sensible he found them in practice. Surely, one of these days he would be called a remarkable instance of a self-made man?

In all possible ways she humbled and obscured herself. It did her good to see that in this way his pride and self-importance (which she knew to be admirable qualities) were developed and sustained, perhaps magnified. There was infinite sweetness even in the humiliation which she suffered when he tyrannised over her and treated her as an inferior being, and browbeat her over little things; in accepting his denomination, his prying into all the innocent little secrets and privacies of her woman-life, his interferences in and direction of her dress, her domestic affairs, and the minutest details of her small recreations.

What if he did make her read books which she did not like, entertain people with whom she could have nothing in common, and deny her the little cherished things that she wanted, and that he thought were trivial and injurious? What if, sometimes, he flew into a passion and heaped abuse and reproaches upon her, when she had tried so faithfully to please him, and had been so humiliated over her own shortcomings? What even, if a blow did come at last, that sent her reeling to the wall, her face blanched, and an inconceivable pain wringing her heart? Was not he the master, the king? Had she not sworn to love honour and obey him? And O, God in Heaven! did she not love him, and would she not have died for him?

The days grew longer then, and heaven—perhaps because she had become more accustomed to it—seemed not so bright as formerly. But still the fire of devotion (and who may know to what extent, if at all, it was fed by duty) burnt brightly within her heart. And what if chilling blasts should come in force seeking to overwhelm it and scatter it to the winds? Steadfast and devoted she had been to the end of the lengthening days. And this, too, is but part of the old, old story.

Towards the very end she did something—in an old, old story like this it never matters what—that sent his passion beyond the bounds within which a blow may bring satisfaction. In their own home, under the very chandelier which her hands had adorned with some fragile ornament, he thrust a pistol against her breast, while his eyes blazed, his face purpled, and his vituperations issued in thick and husky words. He stormed at her for not accepting gratefully the blessing of a comfortable home, of a husband who gave up all pleasures for her sake, and who slaved for her like a beast in the yoke.

And then, his passion rising under her complete abjectness and despair, lashed by the dumbness of white lips from which the power of speech had flown, maddened by the unspeakable reproaches, which, still tempered with the old tenderness, shone from her wide-staring eyes—he pressed the finger of murder upon the trigger.

A crash, a smothered gasp, and she sank to the floor, while he stood there looking down upon her; upon the white, pinched face upturned to his; upon wide eyes which, looking into his, spoke things which heaven has never given to lips the power to express; upon the painful heaving of her chest; upon the form, so lately alive with energy to do his bidding, lying so unshapely and disorganised on the floor; upon the thin stream of blood which so soon issued from her speechless lips; and as he thus looked down upon the pitiful wreck, there unfolded within him a mighty scroll, unwound by a flaming hand; and upon the whole length of it, suspended, as it were, from highest heaven and stretching thence down into nether-most hell, he read the dreadful tragedy of her sacrifice.

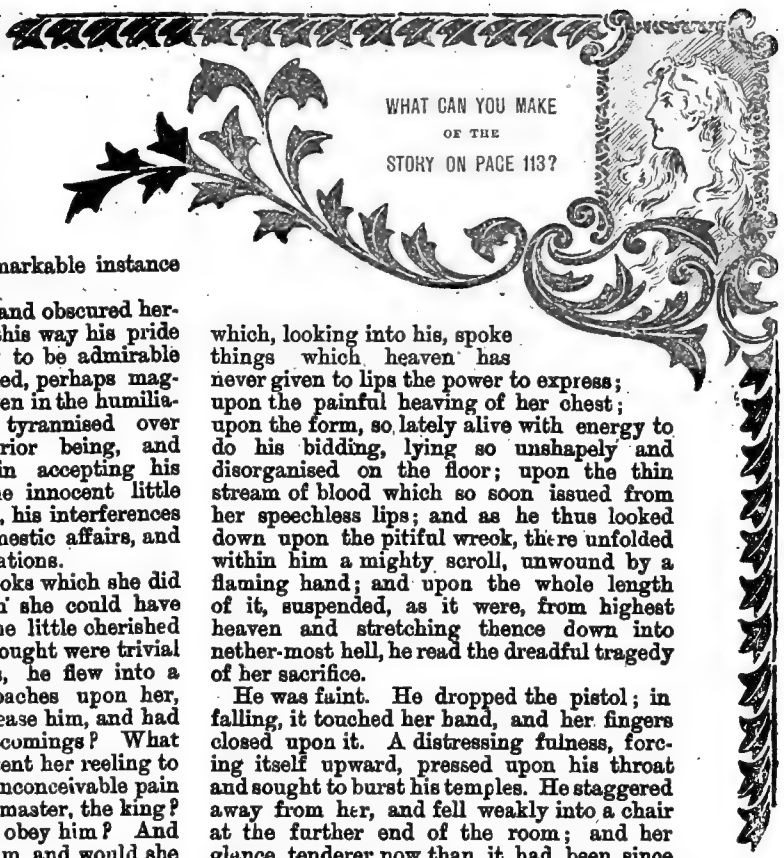
He was faint. He dropped the pistol; in falling, it touched her hand, and her fingers closed upon it. A distressing fulness, forcing itself upward, pressed upon his throat and sought to burst his temples. He staggered away from her, and fell weakly into a chair at the further end of the room; and her glance, tenderer now than it had been since the days had grown long and the light had faded from heaven, followed him thither and rested calmly upon him, as though caring for one thing only, and that, a last impression to take away with her on the wings of eternity and cherish fondly for ever.

Rising above her to confront him, the man saw a shadowy black frame, with a cross-beam from which hung a rope; and it was not in him to go and kneel beside her, and take her hand, and bestow a caress upon her, and beg the infinitely sweet boon of her forgiveness; it was only the scroll that he saw, and the calm, fond eyes, and the shadowy black frame above them.

Someone, attracted by the shot and the fall, came into the room. Was this the avenger of the law, the witness who would hear the accusation of the dying, the builder of the shadowy black frame? Painfully, slowly, the wife said to the intruder: "I have shot—myself; my husband—is not to blame!"

The black frame faded away with her words and her life, for was not the pistol in her hand? And the man, no longer burdened with her living, sat shrunken, cowering and wizened, in the chair.

W. C. Morrow.



POST-CARD COMPETITION.—NO. 4.

On this page a letter is printed upside down. A Guinea is offered to the first person who mentions its position on the back of a post-card before Monday, July 27th next. In order to give provincial readers an equal opportunity, another Guinea is offered for the first correct solution received from readers living over 100 miles from London.

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PAUPER BLUE BLOOD

SUMMARY.

Georgina Pluff is a governess in the employ of the Ravenscrofts. Her charge is Eva, daughter of Sir Reginald and Lady Ravenscroft. Sefton, the only son, is engaged to Lady Norah Cannington, whose father, hearing on good authority of Sir Reginald's impending ruin, compels his daughter to write a letter to Sefton, saying that the engagement must be broken off. Before the financial crash arrives, Sir Reginald commits suicide in his own grounds, and Sefton's cup of bitterness is filled by the arrival of Lady Norah's letter. Georgina Pluff is aware of the late Sir Reginald's past, and threatens to expose his misdeeds unless she is married to Sefton. After the wedding Georgina visits her wealthy cousin, John Pluff, a retired grocer, and impresses him with her social position. Lady Norah receives a visit from a friend of Sefton, Douglas Shirling, who gives expression to his opinion concerning her treatment of Sefton.

CHAPTER VII.

The Market of Souls.

"Who spoke that word? Who called me 'Old Leather-lips'?" thundered John Pluff after a group of boys who were running across a field. He was too hot and stout to give chase, though he shook his fist at the retreating figures.

"Georgina, my dear," turning to Lady Ravenscroft, "this is your land, I believe?"

"Yes, but Sefton is going to let it to Farmer Hicks."

"Never mind, it belongs to you now, and those boys were trespassing. I informed them of the fact, and they addressed me in most insulting language."

"There is nothing on the face of this earth," retorted Georgina, "that can make itself more abominable than the small boy."

Lady Ravenscroft was looking out of sorts and annoyed. Her cousin had forced his society on her, and made her ridiculous in the eyes of everybody. Mr. Shirling, who had arranged to leave the day before John Pluff's arrival, stayed on at Sefton's urgent request. Georgina warned her husband that this relative was hardly one she would have chosen to present, but Sefton never considered her feelings, and failed to take the hint. Of course Douglas Shirling was laughing at her and John Pluff behind their backs, though he appeared unusually grave, never seeming to notice the *gaucheries* of Lady Ravenscroft's grocer cousin. That was natural enough in Mr. Shirling she told herself—a sign of his good breeding—well-bred people were all hypocrites, according to Georgina.

"I've been all round the place, and it's first class," announced Mr. Pluff. "You only want money to keep it up, and you might entertain dukes and duchesses by the score. Give them the best dinners they've ever sat down to, pour out your coin *ad lib.*, and you might be a shining light in society on the very top rail. Bah! it's a wasted chance, Georgina."

She raised her eyes pathetically.

"It is indeed, cousin John. I think, too, that I should know how to make the most of wealth, if it came my way. I feel that the true spirit of the hostess is in my veins. I should fling myself into the part body and soul. I would show Sefton I know the ropes, and he would never feel that he had married an outsider."

"Ah! Georgina, you're up to snuff, and no wonder, since you come of my stock. Our family was always for bettering themselves, and pushing to the front. But look here, my girl, it strikes me that you and the master ain't very chummy; 'ad a bit of a row, eh?"

"Oh! no," shaking her head sadly, "Sefton is always like that now, just dull and indifferent."

"It's a bit soon to begin. Rather a change to before marriage, I reckon. Ha! ha!" breaking into a gruff guffaw, "I should 'ave liked to see you two love birds spooning about here in old Sir Reginald's time. He'd have been down on the governess hammer and tongs, eh!"

John Pluff laughed again; he did not notice the grey hue that crept over the woman's face.

"You quite misunderstand," she said; "Sir Reginald had a great regard for me. If anything, he treated me as his superior. I was never looked down upon, and I dined every night with the family."

She tilted her chin in the air as she spoke, and rounded her words.

"No offence, dear," murmured Mr. Pluff humbly, looking at her with renewed reverence. "But what's altered the young spark? Why does Sir Sefton look so down in the mouth? You would not think he'd married for love, though of course, situated as you was, there *could* be no other reason."

"Shall I give you the key of the whole matter?" cried Georgina, twisting her fingers together, and rocking from one foot to the other with a half nervous, half impatient movement.

John Pluff nodded.

"Money," snapping her fingers, "or rather the need of it, which my husband has never before known. Is not that enough to age and sour a man?"

They had wandered out into the country roads, and as Georgina spoke a Victoria came in sight. A girl, exquisitely gowned, leant back in the carriage with rather a strained expression, and a bright hectic flush rising under her white veil. Beside her sat a peevish-looking youth, whose lips were set. They were not speaking.

Georgina bowed, and the girl returned it unsmilingly, the man raised his hat, a cloud of dust, and they were gone.

"Who are those swells?" asked John Pluff curiously.

"Lady Norah Cannington and the Duke of Malvern."

A low whistle, and a widening of the eyes, as Georgina's cousin regarded her admiringly.

"*My!*" he said, and collapsed into silence.

"Lady Norah is a very old friend of the Ravenscroft's. I dare say she was coming to call on me with the Duke."

Georgina knew full well that this was not the case, but her mission was to impress John Pluff with her poverty and grandeur. She spared no pains.

The sight of Lady Ravenscroft had come at an unfortunate moment for Norah Cannington.

The jealousy, the pique, which she could not control, leapt into her heart as she passed Sefton's wife. She did not pause to consider that her resentment was unreasonable. Her brain seemed on fire, everything was slipping away.

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She turned to the young Duke, and saw that his eyes were weak with rising tears. He had just declared his passion only to be refused. Norah knew well that Lord Cannington expected her to accept the offer—he intimated as much that very morning. She dreaded to think of the scene her decision would cause, anger from one parent—disappointment and reproaches from the other. Was it worth while? Her life could not be more bitter. She had no love to give, but this impressionable youth was not exacting, he would be happy and contented with a pretty face, and the shadow of a heart.

"Norah!" he broke in suddenly, his voice shaken by emotion, "you don't mean it—you *can't?* If you realised what you are to me, you would at least give it a day, an hour's consideration. Heaven knows I will try and make you happy."

Happy! Oh! the irony of that word.

"Is there no hope for me, now or in the future?"

She turned her head away. They were passing the gates of Ravenscroft Park. She felt the Duke of Malvern's fingers tighten over her gloved hand. A dull paralysed sensation deadened her sensibilities. She thought of Georgina's gushing bow, the triumph in her eyes. Why was Sefton so shortsighted? How could he believe she had really changed? *His* Norah faithless! It was impossible!

"Your eyes are softening," whispered a voice at her side. "I see light at last."

Lady Norah faced her youthful lover, with pallid lips, and a wan sweet smile.

"Yes," she said, "you shall make me—happy!"

Then she broke into a strange mirthless laugh, that tore her heart, and left it sore and bleeding.

A Victoria came in sight.

But the Duke of Malvern was happy, for what he called light was in reality merciful darkness, masking the hideous truth of Norah Cannington's wrecked life.

"I shall speak to your father to-night," said the Duke as they drove up to Rosemont.

On entering the house, Lady Norah slipped away, and softly opened the door of her father's study.

A vivid flash of memory brought back the night when Lord Cannington had broken the news of Sefton's altered fortune, and she had been weak enough to resign him under the pressure of a parent's influence.

"Father," she said, advancing to the desk and laying her hand on his shoulder.

He was writing letters in the same chair that she had written her last letter to Sefton Ravenscroft.

"Yes, my child."

He took the little hand tenderly, unaware of the silent misery he had caused. In his eyes, that passed episode was a girlish fancy she had long since forgotten. Why, the fellow was married now, she could not think of him still!

So Lord Cannington calmed the slight prick of conscience he felt, when the Ravenscrofts were plunged in mourning, and his daughter walked about looking like a ghost.

"I have come to tell you," said Lady Norah, "that I am engaged to Victor."

For the first time she spoke of the Duke of Malvern by his christian name.

A certain amount of pity for the worthless goods he was taking to his heart softened her towards him. Any other man must have known and seen how distant she was, how far away, even when he clasped her in his arms. But the Duke was not her equal intellectually, and she knew it, making allowances for him.

Lord Cannington was highly pleased at the news, and did not fail to express his feelings. She listened in silence, then drew away from the parental embrace.

"If you are glad," she declared coldly, "it's all right, only don't congratulate me in private. I shall have to suffer enough 'good wishes' publicly. I don't care what becomes of me in the least, all men are the same, but one, and you stopped me having him. Now I might as well go right as wrong, and I suppose the Duke of Malvern is the most eligible suitor in the market of souls."

Lord Cannington gazed at his daughter in dumb astonishment.

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Never before was there such a hard, bitter ring in Norah's silvery voice. It was a revelation to him.

"What nonsense you are talking, child," he said, not unkindly. "I don't want to sell you, though I won't have you marry a pauper. Besides, if you are harping back to your old affection for Sefton Ravenscroft, that 'love,' as you called it, was merely child's play. How long did he remain faithful to the memory of his passion?"

The words stung Norah to the quick. Lord Cannington little guessed how deep a wound he was probing. He merely noticed that she stood very still, without moving a muscle.

"I only thought I would tell you," she said at last. "It is better to be straight, and speak the truth. I cared for no one before I loved Sefton, and I shall never care again. Therefore, from a worldly point of view it is as well to widen my interests, and try to live down my sorrow as Victor's wife. There is some satisfaction in social success, and it helps to kill the heart. Yes, father, I will kiss you now, I couldn't before, but I think you mean to be kind. I was a fool once, and you meant it for the best. I ought to have stood firm, and never to have given in, but it's easy to talk afterwards."

Her head fell on his shoulder, she stifled a sob which rose involuntarily.

"Don't let mother know. I would rather she thought I was happy. It will please her so much, this engagement with Victor."

"Norah, if you are posing to me as a martyr, if you don't want the fellow, say so, and have done with it. But on one point I will have an understanding. If you don't intend to stick to your word, tell him so at once. Do not wait till all England knows of it, and then back out the last moment. Make your choice now, and let it be final."

Lady Norah drew herself up.

"I do not go back from my word," she said. "*You* made me break it before."

"Is Norah here?" cried a voice outside.

It was Lady Cannington.

"Yes, mother. Come in and hear my news. I have been breaking it to father. I am going to marry the little duke."

She laughed lightly, the old merry twinkle returned to her eyes, but green eyes are false, and as Norah's gazed at her mother their sparkle lied, and her sudden vitality was the outcome of smothered pain.

He took the little hand tenderly.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Duty Visit.

John Pluff was a thorn in the flesh to both Sefton and his wife, the former more especially rebelled against the grocer's invasion.

"Don't take the cad's money," said Sir Sefton gruffly, when Georgina pleaded her cousin's cheques were so useful, that she could not afford to shunt him, though of course she knew "he was different to other people," and a trifle too coarse for polite society.

"He's simply the essence of vulgarity," retorted her husband. "I don't know what you mean about 'different to other people,' the fellow is not mad, only low bred, disgustingly common, and what is far worse, puffed up with pride."

Her head fell on his shoulder.

"I sometimes think you forget, Sefton, when speaking of John Pluff, that it is a delicate subject."

"Nothing very delicate about him that I can see."

"Your sensibilities become more blunted every day. Don't you remember the wretch is a relation of mine?"

"Well, I have not a chance of overlooking the fact, when you 'Cousin' him about everywhere."

"And now," continued Georgina, "he is death on our returning with him to Clapham. Should you mind a little visit there? We need not stay long."

Sefton turned to his wife with an incredulous, hard, superior smile.

"Go to Clapham!" he murmured, as if the bare idea was too absurd for discussion.

"Yes," answered Georgina firmly. "I don't often ask a favour of you."

"No, I fancy you asked enough before our marriage to last a lifetime. I hope you are satisfied. I trust that being Lady Ravenscroft has come up to your expectations."

Georgina tossed her head at his sneer, and replied deliberately. "You'll go to Clapham as a matter of business."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" muttered Sefton.

His tone forebade argument.

"Then at least you will have no objection to my accepting *Cousin* John's invitation."

She spoke spitefully.

"Certainly not. Go by all means. It makes absolutely no difference to me."

"Then I will make your excuses as best I can."

"Oh! don't trouble. I can tell Mr. Pluff."

"Yes, and say something to offend him. *I* know!"

"It is hardly likely I should be rude to any friend of yours in my own house, and if I were, John Pluff would not perceive it. He is too self-satisfied to take a snub." Georgina went slowly downstairs, and

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explained to her cousin, poor Sefton was feeling unwell, and not up to visiting, that was the reason he seemed silent and queer. She feared something wrong with his brain, and dreaded a doctor's bill.

Anyhow it would brace her up to get change of air, even at Clapham, and accordingly arranged to depart with Mr. Pluff the following morning.

"Pack all your best gowns," said her cousin, rubbing his hands together gleefully, "and I'll show you life on a large scale. If you don't mind a scarcity of dooks and lords, you shall be my hostess at some big dinner parties, where the guests will be *smart*, if nothing else. Not tradespeople—don't you fear, a bit more spicy than that—folks that live on the best champagne, and know how to dress. You see Mr. Jackson, a friend of mine, is manager at the D—— Theatre, and I am running the piece, providing the capital. Well, one good turn deserves another, I am mighty useful to him, and he has a very large acquaintance. He introduces me, and I entertain. To have Lady Ravenscroft at the head of my table will give me a lift, and it will do you good to have a fling. It ain't very amusing sitting in state waiting for the county toffs to call."

Georgina heartily agreed, for it was chiefly "waiting." The thought of "cutting a dash," as her cousin termed it, amongst people who would look up to her, instead of holding aloof, was alluring in the extreme.

She had ordered herself some beautiful tea-gowns, the bill for which John had promised to settle; they would arrive just in time. So thirsting for dissipation she gladly fell in with her cousin's plans, and commenced designing dinner table decorations of the most costly description. She said nothing of this, however, to her husband, declaring that she was simply going to Clapham for his sake.

"Forgive me for bowing down to the mammon of unrighteousness," she cried flippantly. "You will exist without me."

The last sentence verged on sarcasm. He received it in silence, while Georgina thought with pleasurable excitement of the many titled names among her husband's friends she could slip into her conversation for the benefit of Mr. Pluff's guests.

By so doing she would win his everlasting gratitude.

"But I won't be a snob for nothing," Georgina told herself. "I'll make him pay."

Sir Sefton watched them go with a sense of unutterable relief.

John Pluff did not deeply regret his absence, and boasted to Georgina, as they drove away, of the special railway compartment he had engaged for the journey, and the large tips he bestowed upon her servants.

Douglas Shirling was still at Ravenscroft Park. Numerous and attractive were the house-parties at which he had failed to put in an appearance, owing to his friend's intense need of companionship. Sefton grew daily more depressed and irritable, only cheering up in Shirling's society.

The latter noticed that after Georgina's departure her husband became quite his old self again. It was as if he had determined to throw off the burden while he could, and forget it even existed. He readily agreed to accompany Douglas back to his home—Lord Gatton's seat in Wiltshire. Change was what he wanted, change of scene, and freedom from Georgina.

His mother and Eva were staying at Ermyn Way, which made the prospect all the pleasanter, and the two men left Ravenscroft Park that same day.

"I wish I could afford to travel, I'd go round the world to-morrow," said Sefton in the train. He was thinking how delightful a long absence from Ravenscroft Park would be.

Douglas Shirling read his friend's thoughts, and compared his own happy-go-lucky existence, crowned by every happiness the world could give, with Sefton's unenviable lot.

The marriage was still as great a puzzle to him as the first day he set eyes on the now Lady Ravenscroft.

Douglas took up a paper and read it mechanically, till something made him gather his wits together. It was a paragraph announcing Lady Norah's engagement to the Duke of Malvern.

He went over it twice, then he looked up with a long drawn sigh.

"So she's going to do it!" he said, handing the paper across. "I wonder which of the two will regret it the most?"

A stony look came into Sefton's eyes, as he scanned the news. He was conscious of a burning ache within, a sudden quickening of the breath.

"She can't love that bilious looking puppy," he muttered savagely.

"Oh, no. Those sort of women don't go in for affection, it is out of their sphere, they can't comprehend it. They have the faces and forms of angels, the hearts and souls of devils."

Having delivered himself of this distressing statement,

"I wish I could afford to travel."

Douglas Shirling lit a cigar, buried himself behind a paper and ignored the presence of his friend. He knew just then it was the kindest thing to do, and Sefton felt grateful. He stared through the open window, picturing Norah and her lover in the dear old familiar haunts at Rosemont.

Would she sit on that same seat under the copper beech, talking of twin souls, and ridiculing affinities, with a charming laugh, till her bewildered adorer was reduced to a state of despair? Then, as she had done once before, sink on her knees in an attitude of mock humility, and plead forgiveness. Would she fish with him along the banks of the river, and murmur a pitiful apology to the gasping trout she killed against her boot? Sefton fancied he heard the smack of its head on her heel; while she feelingly declared "She could not bear that they should suffer, the little dears!"

And then the walk on moonlight evenings, when she trailed her dinner dress across the dewy lawn, shrinking from countless imaginary spectres in the bushes, only that he (whoever the lucky "he" might be) would place a protecting arm round her slim waist.

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Unending were the memories that crowded back into Sefton's mind as the train whirled onwards.

But memory is only a wave washing the shore of the mind.

It drags back a handful of shingle, and swallows it up in the ocean of circumstance.

When Douglas Shirling spoke again, Sefton woke as from a dream. The waves were still once more, and the paper, with that loathsome announcement, fell unheeded at his feet.

"For the post," she said.

The fresh air dispersed his gloomy reflections, as he drove with Douglas through the quaint old town of Salisbury to Ermyn Way, in the high tandem that had come to meet them.

As they approached the house a group of familiar faces round a tea-table under the trees greeted Sefton.

There was his mother, in her black dress, flushing with pleasure at the sight of her son, and Eva scampering across the grass, just as in the old days, when they had all stayed together in Lord and Lady Gatton's home.

In the meanwhile Georgina was revelling in more ostentatious and less refined luxury at Queen's Gate House. She liked ordering John Pluff's large staff of servants hither and thither, being waited on hand and foot, and not having to think of the weekly books.

"I've got an exquisite idea for your dinner-table to-morrow night," said Lady Ravenscroft. "It is to be all blue and orange, the Ravenscroft colours you know. You can explain to your guests that you had it purposely arranged so out of compliment to me."

"Happy thought! Guess it will look grand," chuckled John Pluff. "I want to do it well for the Pynes to see. They are very rich people, and entertain in South Kensington. I've got an eye to Miss Pyne, between ourselves, Georgina. Her mother was one of the wealthy family of Moses, a decided Jewess, but that don't trouble me. Mr. and Mrs. P. are both going to honour us, likewise Miss Nesta P. and her two brothers."

"A perfect plague of Pynes," sighed Georgina impatiently, her heart beating faster with apprehension, as she thought of the daughter.

Would John Pluff make such a fool of himself as to marry a young girl at his age? She feared it was very likely. The bare idea turned her cold with fear.

"Now, two opinions are better than one," continued her cousin, "and I want you to tell me exactly what you think of Miss P. I am not one to be hurried, and I want the best in the market, so now you know."

"Very well. Then hold back, and rely on my taste. I should like to see you marry someone I should be proud of introducing to the country people at home. She must be good style, or, of course, I could hardly ask her to Ravenscroft Park."

John Pluff rubbed his chin.

"Well they are not so easy to find, Georgina. Now, Nesta (I like to call her Nesta), she is a well set-up fine girl, and dresses awfully smartly. I might do worse."

The conversation was becoming positively painful to Georgina. She longed to take John Pluff by the shoulders and shake him.

"I won't offer an opinion till after to-morrow."

She left him, feeling too aggrieved to continue the conversation, and locked herself into her room to regain her temper. It was maddening to think of a second marriage, when John Pluff's purse was all she had to rely on for suitable gowns to grace her position, and then there was always his death in view. If she wheedled herself sufficiently into his good graces, and steered him clear of designing females, it was even possible.

Georgina paused, and gasped at the thought which crept into her mind, and set her brain on fire.

Money! What would it not mean to her?

Sefton sneered at the wife who had forced herself upon him, but how would he treat her with John Pluff's fortune at her back?

Georgina clasped her hands over her heart to still its beating. These wild day dreams made her dizzy. She was sick of scraping and pinching, the luxury of Queen's Gate House filled her covetous soul with hungry longing.

It was an effort to bring her mind back to the practical reality of her uneasy existence. Surely she could devise some plan to add to her income.

A sudden inspiration seized her. She crossed to the writing table and wrote several letters, tearing them up in turn, but finally satisfying herself, addressed an envelope, and rang her bell.

"For the post," she said, as the maid answered the summons. "I wonder," she thought, "what Sefton would say to it. I don't care, I mean to have my way henceforth —in everything!"

With this resolve Georgina went down and rejoined John Pluff.

CHAPTER IX.

Youth and Age.

The garden of Queen's Gate House was flooded in moonlight, it was a stiflingly oppressive evening.

John Pluff's long dinner had almost exhausted the patience of the guests.

But interminable as the courses seemed, the grateful reaction of dessert arrived, then the welcome signal from Lady Ravenscroft, and a haven of repose reached in the blue satin chairs of a large drawing-room.

All the windows were flung open, crimson lanterns illuminated the verandah without, inviting a stroll in the fresh air.

Georgina had, from the moment of their arrival, subjected the Pyne family to severe criticism. They were her mortal foes, she thought, as she conversed with the overheated Jewess, whose face appeared in a state of melting moisture unpleasant to witness.

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Her conversation consisted solely of admiring anecdotes connected with her daughter Nesta, and the "dear boys." She always alluded to her sons as the "dear boys." They were twin youths, tall, dark, and of Jewish countenance. Each wore a black rimmed eyeglass, very high collar, and extravagantly large buttonhole, which stamped them as unfashionable in Georgina's eyes.

"Buttonholes are not worn this season," she informed Mrs. Pyne, who was holding forth on the unique shade of the "dear boys'" carnations.

"Not worn! Why, Lady Ravenscroft, are you one of those unhappy women who follow the flock of sheep trooping to the slaughter-house of Fashion? It makes slaves of us all, not only in dress, but even in mannerisms and tricks of voice. I was told of a Lady-in-waiting who spent all her time endeavouring to sneeze like the Princess of Wales. It was during an influenza wave, and the fashionable sneeze became as well-known as the bonnet of the month."

Miss Nesta Pyne, a raven-haired beauty, gowned in scarlet, was seated at the far end of the room, gazing at a full length painting of John Pluff. Her dashing costume, and white arms and neck sorely disturbed Georgina's peace of mind.

"Just the style to attract him," thought Lady Ravenscroft, as the sound of her cousin's obtrusive laugh could be heard from the dining-room. It was a laugh that always made Georgina hot to her very ears. It generally burst forth after a story that were better left unrepeated. He would listen in silence, then came a sudden indentation of his features, a widening of the mouth, and finally like a cannon's roar—a rushing forth of impetuous sound, all-engulfing, deafening, hideous!

"It does me good to listen to dear Mr. Pluff's merriment," murmured Mrs. Pyne. "It is so robustly honest."

Lady Ravenscroft pursed up her mouth, shrugged her shoulders, and sought consolation by regarding her gorgeously flowing gown in a mirror opposite. She knew which chair to choose for this purpose. She still clung to her old fancy for dull yellow. In the days of Sir Reginald it was mustard coloured crépon, now she affected saffron tinted satin with pepper hued chiffon.

Georgina's swagger convinced these second-class people that she was far their superior, yet sweetly condescending, when promising to appear at various entertainments at their invitations.

"I shall be delighted to dine with you on the twelfth if Sir Sefton can spare me a week longer," or, "Really I *ought* to return to Ravenscroft Park, *but*," etc., etc.

She received no letter from Sefton, but found his name in a list of Lord Gatton's house party at Ermyn Way.

This fact was a boon to her throughout the evening.

Nesta Pyne sat silent and pensive till the gentlemen rejoined them. She had an expectant look on her face, as if she were waiting for something. Her expression irritated Georgina, who found herself perpetually tracing in the girl's features likenesses to people she knew.

John Pluff's eyes wandered round the room till they settled upon Nesta, then he took a seat beside her, and became mawkishly sentimental, and boastfully bouncing in turns.

"Sitting under my picture, eh?" he said, in answer to a murmured speech, breathed into his ear by Nesta's carmine lips. "It cost me a clear 'thou,' that bit of a daub, and they have not given me much of a mug either!"

Nesta gazed into his eyes and smiled bewitchingly.

"Sitting under my picture, eh?"

"Does that mean face?" she asked innocently.

John Pluff indulged one of his explosive fits at the innocent question.

"Bless me, you're as bad as my little Georgy there!" indicating Lady Ravenscroft. "She is always quizzing my 'lingo,' as she calls it. I wish we could get out for a wander on the terrace, but I don't know what to do with all these people. They will be following us as sure as a gun."

"Ask my brother Algy to sing, and David will accompany him. Then we can slip away unobserved."

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John Pluff gushed up to the "dear boys," with a benign and irresistible smile.

"Give us a ditty," he said, at the same time catching hold of Algy's coat sleeve, and dragged him to the piano.

David whispered he could not accompany his brother, being afflicted with violent indigestion.

His host however declared that was no excuse, indigestion could not attack the fingers, and announced to the company that the brothers Pyne would favour with a little music.

"I say," whined Algy, "David's no good. Nesta accompanies me far more feelingly, it's just twice the effect."

But such an awful paralysing look came into John Pluff's usually good-tempered face, that Algy was utterly quelled, and David, with a martyred expression, struck a chord weakly to command silence.

The hubbub of voices ceased; all eyes turned on the "dear boys."

John Pluff edged towards the open window, Nesta being already on the verandah.

"You are *wonderful!*" she murmured coyly, as they strolled away. "This reminds me of that beautiful evening at the Richmond Rowing Club ball."

"What a night we had! It makes my heart thump to think of it."

"I—I hope you did not dance too violently. It is very dangerous with a weak heart."

"Come, come my dear—you know my meaning full well, and it's no good beating about the bush. I am a plain spoken man—and I'll put it to you straight. Look here, Miss Pyne—Nesta, my love—I'm yours for the asking!" He announced this marvellous piece of news with an expectant smile, his breast swelling with anticipation.

Why was the girl silent? Overcome by glad surprise? Stunned by the pleasurable shock?

She bent her pretty head, and her face was scarlet as the gown she wore.

"Well!" he cried at last, a trifle nettled at her apparent lack of appreciation.

"I—am—not—accustomed—to—proposing," she gasped, still turning away that he might not see the expression in her eyes.

"Well now that's good—that's rich!" rubbing his hands together. "As if a man ever made a clearer declaration than myself at this moment! Come to my arms, there's nothing to fear. It's all straight and square, and I'll fix it up with Mr. and Mrs. P. to-morrow, as ever is. I'm not one to stick at settlements."

Nesta turned sharply in the bright moonlight, and moved a step or two back, facing him with a look that puzzled and bewildered John Pluff.

It was an expression of intense overwhelming amusement. A merriment that had been suppressed till the controlling of it almost amounted to pain. Nesta was a girl who acted and carried on a joke for her entertainment. She needed no one to share it, her own appreciative powers were enough.

As she surveyed the stout elderly man who offered her his hand in marriage, a laugh she could no longer keep back, rippled forth on the still air.

It was a thoroughly genuine peal, a laugh that refused to be confined, and leapt across her cheeks, dimpled her chin, dived under to her neck, scrambled along her ears, and finally capering across the temples passed away into a realm of smiles.

Mr. Pluff gave an uncertain "ha! ha!" and asked what the joke was.

"Why, *you* of course, you dear old goose! I do believe you actually thought I should jump down your throat!"

Her host assured her he expected no such acrobatic feat from a lady, especially one so dignified, so *self-possessed* as Miss Pyne.

This with a mock bow, and effort at sarcasm.

"Well, it's really too funny. As if all the fellows were not after me, and as if I had not my own especial 'best man' coming back from Gibraltar next week to 'fix it all up with Mr. and Mrs. P.' But there, you're a nice old thing, and I ought not to be making sport of you."

"Sport, sport of *me* indeed," muttered Mr. Pluff, walking back towards the house, with elevated head, and extended nostrils. "Oh! don't imagine *I* care."

"Do stop a minute, if you go in looking like that everyone will guess."

He paused, aware of the beads of perspiration on his forehead, his swift, heavy breathing, inspired by rage, not love.

It was no easy matter to pacify his wounded pride, and as Nesta Pyne endeavoured to soothe the feelings she had wantonly ruffled, Georgina Pluff suddenly became aware of their absence.

It turned her cold and sick. She saw it all. John had purposely asked for the singing that he might slip away and flirt with that minx in the moonlight. Perhaps he was offering his heart and fortune to the designing creature.

There was not a moment to be lost. They must be disturbed at once. She rose, and moved towards the window.

"There are chairs here in the verandah, won't you all come out. The night is *so* delicious!"

Her suggestion was immediately taken up.

The first sight that greeted Georgina's vigilant eyes was a red dress walking by a stout figure.

Mr. Pluff looked grave. Had the mischief been done? Was her move—too late?

"Cousin John," she cried, shaking her fist playfully, "you missed two of the most charming songs. Mr. Pyne is quite a genius. Come here, I want to scold you for deserting us, and what is far worse, robbing your guests of Miss Pyne's delightful society."

"That's right," laughed a short, square man at her side, with diamond studs and jewelled rings. "Keep the old man in order, Lady Ravenscroft. He needs a restraining hand, and always marches off with the prettiest girls."

How little the speaker guessed the mental torture his words were giving Georgina.

"He is too old to care about girls," she replied curtly.

"Don't you think it, my lady, the older they get, the worse they become. It's a disease that increases with age, and the young 'uns like it; even when they are as good looking as Miss Nesta. It is a case of the hay-stack, I reckon, and which side the bread is buttered. They like the butter laid on thick, and won't be put off with margarine."

By this time Miss Pyne was safely back among her friends, laughing and talking as gaily as any, coquetting with married and single men, ridiculing their remarks, and making herself generally conspicuous.

When the guests had left, Georgina addressed John Pluff in a tone of utter disgust. "If *that* is your choice," she said, "I pity you, and, as to introducing her into country society, well, it would be absolutely impossible! Of all the vulgar, pushing, ill-mannered girls, give me Nesta Pyne. She's out-and-out bad style, Cousin John, take my word for it. You won't help *yourself* on in society by taking up with *her*."

"I quite agree with you," he replied, to Lady Ravenscroft's surprise. "Her bad taste has never been so blatant as to-night; the scales have fallen from my eyes. I shall *not* marry her."

A gasp of relief escaped Georgina. "It is very nice of you to take my advice in this matter, Cousin John; I feel highly gratified and flattered," she murmured, calming down.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "They are not the sort of family I should care to marry into. Mr. and Mrs. P. are all right in their way, but I would not trust the daughter."

Georgina kissed her cousin affectionately. For once she felt loving towards him, and retired to her room well pleased.

"I've squashed that young woman," she said to herself. "There is one danger removed. I shall have to keep John well under my eye, he is so easily led away, but becomes instantly docile under my influence. How they pandered to me to-night—those parvenus!"

(To be continued.)

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By the Night Train.

"You must travel alone, then, Ned, my boy. It is a tiresome thing, but it can't be helped. At latest, I shall be at C—— in good time on the wedding morning. Tell Carry so, with my love," said my father, laughing off his vexation at being thus peremptorily detained in London.

These were the circumstances of the case. My engagement—a two years' engagement, insisted upon by my own parent no less than by Admiral Lethbridge, that the "young people might know their own minds," most unreasonable and unnecessary as the delay had appeared to those principally concerned—was drawing to a happy close. I was to marry dear, pretty Carry Lethbridge, with the full consent and approval of both families. The wedding-day was drawing near, and my sister Clara, who was to be one of the bridesmaids, was staying at C—— with Caroline and her mother and sisters, in anticipation of the ceremony. Rear-Admiral Lethbridge resided at C——, and there, of course, the marriage was to take place. And my father and I had intended going down to C—— some three days before the wedding, and taking up our quarters at the hotel there. By the merest hazard, or apparent hazard, the execution of this plan was prevented, so far as my father's share in it was concerned.

My father had been summoned as a witness before a Parliamentary Committee of the House of Lords, and it had been notified to him that although, in consequence of frequent adjournments, his evidence might not be called for for a day or two, it was necessary that he should be in actual attendance, lest "My Lords" should find the private bill in hand pass more rapidly through its preliminary stages than was expected. The Parliamentary lawyer by whom my father was subpœnaed was civil enough to add that the committee could by no means dispense with Mr. Henley's very valuable testimony and advice.

"Very complimentary; but uncommonly tiresome," said I, really annoyed, in spite of the usual unselfishness of a young man and a lover; for my father and I were on terms of much confidence and affection, and I was aware that he had looked forward to this trip as one of his rare holidays. "The Lethbridges will be sorry, and so will Clara also. Cannot you come, after all?"

My father laughed.

"No, no, Edgar," said he; "I should expect to see Black Rod draw my curtains at the dead of night, come to take me into custody for treason. Committees must be obeyed. But never mind! I shall be with you on Saturday, before the wedding breakfast is laid out. And now I must be off to Westminster. You go by the night train, of course?"

My father and I shook hands, and I turned into Bond Street, where a double stream of carriages flowed slowly and strugglingly past, and where the crowd of lounging foot-passengers was at its height.

My first call was at the shop of the well-known Court jewellers, Miles and Henderson, and its object was to fetch away a certain set of pearl and ruby ornaments which my father had ordered, and which were his present to his future daughter-in-law. Mr. Henley had looked forward with pleasure to placing these costly toys in the bride's hands; but since he had been compelled to postpone his arrival at C——, he had good-naturedly but firmly insisted that I should take the jewels down with me, and give them to Carry in his name. I had not seen the design of the ornaments, but I was aware that the device was a new and well-chosen one; and from my father's liberality, of which I had since childhood received so many proofs, I had little doubt that the gift would prove to be a splendid one.

As I was in the act of opening the jewellers' door, a man passed me so closely as to brush my elbow, and, turning his head, looked me for a moment in the face. His own face was a remarkable one, or rather would have appeared remarkable elsewhere than in London, where the natives of all countries are every day to be met, jostling each other unnoticed in the midst of the great seething stream of restless human life that fills our streets.

This person, evidently a foreigner, was about forty years of age, wore spectacles, a bushy, red-brown beard, and a threadbare suit of black, shabby, but well brushed and neat. So far his appearance corresponded, more or less accurately, with that of a legion of professors, doctors, and philosophers, dubious hangers-on of the learned professions, whom Red Republican tenets and police hostility have landed in the limbo of Leicester Square.

But I could not help feeling a thrill of repugnance and dislike at the aspect of that broad, flat, white face, with its Tartar coarseness of feature, the sharp white teeth just visible between the thin lips, and the long, narrow eyes blinking catlike through the glasses of the spectacles. Can you fancy a white-faced tiger, badly pitted by the smallpox, walking erect in human guise, and stealthily pursuing his way through a jungle, not of the trees but of houses? Such was the impression which the first glimpse of that foreigner's face made upon me. In the next instant, I laughed at myself for my folly.

"The poor man cannot help his ugliness," said I to myself, as I followed the shopman to his employer's office on the first floor, near the glittering showrooms. He is a Russian, of course, too advanced in political ideas no doubt to please the Tsar and the police Prefect. Not a

very pleasant person, though, to trust with a guillotine if his party should ever be uppermost."

And then Mr. Miles, bald and florid, came civilly forward to welcome me, and I forgot the Russian and all connected with him.

"Certainly, my dear sir, certainly," said the jeweller, unlocking the strongest of safes with the tiniest of Bramah keys, and tossing over a quantity of *écrins* labelled with the names of half the duchesses and countesses in the Red Book.

"Here is the set that your esteemed father, Mr. Henley, was so good as to order. Very old and respected customer of ours is Mr. Henley. I sold him—dear me! thirty years ago it must have been—a set of emeralds for Mrs. Henley's wearing. Not a very costly set, but in good taste, in capital taste. Mr. Henley had but lately come back then from Calcutta. His was a new name then on the Stock Exchange and in the Bank parlour. No name higher now; but his taste was always excellent, always. Here are the stones. I sent a set nearly similar last week for the wedding of Lady Florence Fetherton, but not so fine, I give you my word, as a tradesman of fifty years' standing, not so fine."

I think these words were either uttered in a louder tone than the rest of the jeweller's discourse, or a lull in the roll and rumble of the carriages made them unusually distinct, but at any rate three or four of the passers-by turned their heads inquisitively towards old Mr. Miles and myself, as we stood in the open doorway. And among those three or four was the ugly foreigner with the red-brown beard. He was repassing the shop coming from the opposite direction to that in which he had previously been walking. A coincidence, no doubt! Merely a coincidence.

I beckoned to the driver of a hansom, sauntering past on the look-out for a fare, and rattled down to my club, and after a quiet dinner drove to the station, first assuring myself that the precious jewels were safe in my pocket.

"Your luggage is labelled, Mr. Edgar, and ready to be put into the van," said old Jones, my father's confidential servant, touching his hat respectfully. "I have put the rugs and sticks and fishing-rods into an empty first-class carriage third from the bookstall to the left."

"Very well, Jones. Just see the luggage put in. I must get my ticket," answered I, and hurried to the ticket office where several impatient passengers were hustling and elbowing one another, while a stout lady, one of those voluble but unprotected female travellers who are the scourges and torments of all officials, was blocking up the window and holding a long and discursive argument with the booking-clerk on the subject of her fare, her change, her preference for slow trains, and the best way in which she could reach some cross country line some eighty miles off. At last, however, even this lady voyager's demands, or the clerk's patience, being exhausted, I managed to crush my way to the window, and to take my ticket for C——.

"First class to C——, monsieur!" said a peculiarly harsh and strident voice at my elbow, with a slight but perceptible foreign accent in its tones, and I glanced round at the man, who was thrusting a half-washed, muscular hand, decorated by a heavy gold signet-ring, past me to lay his money on the counter.

With some surprise I recognised the Russian whom I had seen twice on that very afternoon in front of the jeweller's shop. The recognition did not appear mutual. He never looked at me, but re-demanded his ticket in a quick, angry manner, and having got it, he fell back and mingled with the crowd.

By the time I had reached the carriage in which Jones had arranged my lighter luggage, I saw him approach with the guard, who unlocked the carriage, held open the door for my entry, and, having received the usual silver compliment that has now become a vested interest on railways, closed and relocked it, saying that I should "have the compartment to myself if I wished to smoke."

On the well-lighted platform outside the usual bustle which precedes the departure of a train was going on. Porters were wheeling heavy barrowloads of luggage rapidly past me, all the quicker in their movements because the warning bell had begun clanging for the first time; mail-guards were dragging along the huge sacks of letters that were impatiently awaited by the sorters in the post-office carriage; newspaper boys were thrusting evening journals into the faces of nervous passengers, wistfully leaning out to see after the safety of those trunks that the porter had glibly assured them would "be all right"; and paterfamilias was gathering his strayed family round him, or wrangling over a charge of overweight.

"Open this door, you guard. Halloa, guard! Open the door of this carriage, will you?"

It was thus that my reverie was broken in upon. A strange traveller, with a railway rug over his arm, was roughly shaking the door of the compartment where I sat alone. The guard came up rather reluctantly. Railway guards are discriminating persons as to social conditions, and the new-comer's coarse manners and husky voice were not calculated to inspire respect.

"First-class, sir?" asked the guard, and when the man produced his ticket, the guard was still too loyal to my tacit compact with him to permit the invasion of my privacy without an effort to preserve it.

"First-class to C——, sir? This way, please. Plenty of room here." And he tried to draw the intruder towards a distant carriage that was half full. But this manœuvre failed.

"There is plenty of room in this carriage. Look sharp and let me in," said the obstinate traveller; and the guard, being an English and not a French official, succumbed and unlocked the door.

He apologised to me in a gruff whisper: "Couldn't help myself, sir."

"Never mind," said I smiling, and applied myself to observing the new-comer, who sat down, not opposite to me, but in the middle partition full in the glare of the lamp.

In a very short time I had, as I thought, taken the measure of this not very delightful fellow traveller. He was a young man, perhaps a year my senior, strongly built and with rather a handsome face, sadly marred by very evident traces of dissipation. He wore a coat of sporting cut; a blue "bird's-eye" scarf with a horseshoe pin in it, and a great deal of dubious jewellery in the shape of rings, watch-chain, and dangling trinkets. The railway rug that lay across the knees of his tight-fitting drab trousers was of a gaudy pattern, yellow and red. His eyes were bloodshot, his voice thick, and he smelt strongly of bad tobacco and worse brandy. To all appearances he was a betting man, or sporting "gent" of the lower substratum of that uninviting class.

The bell rang for the last time. There was the customary final rush and scurry of belated passengers and porters, and the voices of the newspaper boys grew

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shriller and more excited. Then the guards sprang to the steps of their vans, and the station-master looked warily up and down the line preparatory to signalling to the engine-driver. At that moment a man came darting across the platform, tore open the door, jumped in and sat down opposite to me. A policeman ran up and shut the door.

"All right behind!"

The train began to move. I looked at my opposite neighbour, and could hardly repress an exclamation of surprise and vexation. The Russian! Yes, there was no mistaking the man. I knew that red-brown beard, that flat tigerish face, those long crafty eyes, black and narrow as an American Indian's, perfectly well.

I had seen the man at the ticket-window, certainly, but that was more than ten minutes ago, and I had been confident that he had long since taken his seat in some other compartment of the train. Such however was not the case. Had he dogged me all that evening, tracking me with a bloodhound's pertinacity from the jeweller's door to the railway carriage? It was possible, though not likely. But in vain I tried to dismiss the idea as silly and romantic. It recurred again and again. And yet why should he or anyone dog my steps?

The answer to this self-question soon came. The jewels, the costly set of pearl and ruby ornaments I carried about me, and of which this man had probably overheard the garrulous old jeweller make mention! And yet the Russian had hardly the air of a pickpocket. There was something defiant and arrogant in his look, and an undefinable air of education clung to him in spite of his shabby exterior. And as for violence, I had a young man's confidence in my own power to cope with any single antagonist, and beside I was not alone with him.

So far my thoughts had gone, while I gazed abstractedly from the window, as if marking the last lights of the London suburbs as the dark hedges and dim meadows succeeded to houses and factories, but then I cast a glance round and saw a sight which caused me an involuntary thrill of alarm. The two passengers in the carriage were rapidly and secretly conversing by means of signs.

There could be no doubt upon the point. The two men who were my sole companions in that rapid and lonely journey, ill-looking desperadoes each in his separate style, were accomplices. Up to that moment I had not for an instant suspected any collusion between the two. They came at different times, one was English the other a foreigner, and between the shabby lecturer and the betting man sodden with drink, and attired in flashy finery, any previous acquaintance seemed improbable. Yet, there they were rapidly communicating with one another by means of some thieves' alphabet of finer telegraphy, unaware as yet that I had observed them. So far as I could make out, the foreigner was urging the other to some course which the Englishman was reluctant to pursue.

I am not, I believe, one whit more disposed to timidity than most of my fellow countrymen, and yet I must confess that my blood ran cold and my heart almost ceased beating as the truth dawned upon me. I was the victim evidently of an artful and treacherous scheme. That cab—that sudden appearance of the Russian at the terminus—that persistency of his English confederate to occupy a seat in the carriage where I sat alone. All was clear to me now. Robbery, no doubt, was the object of the two villains in whose company I was shut up, and probably they would hesitate at no crime to obtain possession of the valuable jewels I so incautiously carried about my person. Both were strong men; probably armed, too; and though I braced my nerves and set my teeth for a struggle, I had little hope of a successful resistance, none of rescue. The train was racing fast through the black stillness of a moonless night. There was to be no stoppage short of C——, and more than an hour must elapse before that station was reached.

At that moment when my thoughts had travelled thus far, I made some slight movement; the Russian looked up, and our eyes met. The villain saw that his by-play had been observed, and instantly threw off the mask. Grinding out an oath between his set teeth, he rose from his seat. I rose, too; and as the Russian noticed the action he sprang like a tiger at my throat, grappling with me so closely that the blow I dealt him but partly took effect. Linked together we wrestled furiously for a few seconds, rising and falling; but I was the younger and more agile of the two, and had nearly overpowered my enemy, when his confederate came to his aid and dealt me a succession of crushing blows upon the head with some heavy weapon, beneath which I fell, stunned and helpless, with my face covered with blood and senses gone. When I came to myself again, the ruffians were rifling my pockets as I lay on the floor of the carriage. The Russian had opened one of the morocco cases that held the ornaments, and he was examining the gems by the light of the lamp overhead. The other villain was searching for fresh plunder. He was livid with agitation, I noticed, and his face was blotched with crimson and damp with heat drops, while his hands trembled very much. He it was who first spoke, in a husky whisper.

"What shall we do with him?"

"Toss him out. The fall won't hurt him," sneered the Russian.

It was plain that they believed me to be dead. I lay still, resolved that no cry, no twitching of an eyelid, should betray that life was still not extinct. Too well I knew that mercy was hopeless, and that my chance would be far better if flung out, at the risk of being mangled and crushed beneath the whirling iron wheels, than if I remained in that luxurious first-class carriage with those two wild beasts in human guise ready to finish their work at the first sign that I yet lived.

The Russian leant out of the window, and cautiously opened the door. I felt the chill of the fresh night upon my cheek as I lay. Then I had to summon all my resolution to my help to repress a shudder as the murderers stooped and lifted me up, one taking me by the head, and the other by the feet, as butchers carry a slaughtered calf. The Englishman breathed hard and trembled perceptibly as he dragged me towards the gaping doorway.

"I don't half like the job," he growled out.

The Russian gave a scornful laugh.

"Pitch the carrion out, *blanc bec* that you are! One, two, three, and over with him."

I remember one agonised moment of suspense as I was violently thrust forward, one hurried, frenzied prayer that rose from my heart to my lips, but was drowned by the roar and rush of the long train of massive carriages as they tore along the iron way. I was launched out, and felt myself falling, and then I dropped with a crash, and my brain reeled and sensation seemed again to desert me.

On coming gradually to myself, my first vague perception was that I formed a part of some vast moving

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body speeding swiftly along, swinging and swaying, but rushing fast through the cool night air. Then, as memory returned, I began to realise my position. In falling, when the assassins had thrown me out of the carriage where the robbery had taken place, I had dropped upon the wooden plank that runs like an elongated step below the carriages, and my hand had closed mechanically, in a clutch like that of a drowning man, on some projecting portion of the ironwork above, which I presently conjectured to be the prop of one of the iron steps by which passengers ascend. And there I clung instinctively, like a limpet to a rock, while the swerving, swinging train flew madly on through the black night.

It was a position of fearful peril. True I had escaped immediate death; but to all appearances my fate was only deferred. The train was not to halt till it reached C——; I despaired of being able to hold on till then, for already my cramped sinews seemed to be stiffening, and my attitude was a painful and uneasy one. And by night there was no hope that my danger would be observed, and an alarm given, as I was hurled helpless and despairing through the darkness. The wounds I had received in the head caused me a dull aching pain, and I was weak with loss of blood; but my thoughts were coherent and clear.

I knew my risk well. If I fell *now* I must certainly be left behind a mutilated corpse, torn to fragments by the cruel wheels that whirred and spun close by me. My only chance was to hold on—to hold on till I reached C——, if my strength lasted so long. Once or twice I essayed a cry for help, but my feeble voice was lost in the noise of the train. And presently I felt thankful that it had not been heard, for, from the window of the carriage to the left of where I lay crouching, was protruded the head of a man who peered into the night; and I shrank still closer to the woodwork as I recognised in the faint lamp-light the flat white face, the red-brown beard, the tigerish grin of the Russian, my late fellow-traveller. He did not see me, however, but resumed his place with a well satisfied air.

On we went through the silent country, with scream and rush and roar—now diving into tunnels, now ploughing our way between deep banks, now among the dark trees and hedges. On past the lighted stations, where the signal was made that the road was clear, and where porters and passengers, waiting for some slower train that stopped there, were to be seen watching us as we flew past. But they never saw me as I clung, with desperate grip and aching limbs, to the swiftly-hurrying mass of wood and iron.

Twice during that phantom ride I heard the shriek of the steam-whistle of a coming train, and twice I saw the red lamps and flame of the advancing engine glaring through the dark like the angry eyes and lurid breath of some monstrous creature rushing down upon its prey. And then, with clang and clash, and deafening roar, and in the midst of a gush of wind caused by its rapid progress, the long array of carriages went by me. On, on, as if impelled by a demon's force, we flew; and still feebler grew my arm, and I felt despair and fatigue benumb my faculties and was half tempted to let go my hold and drop and face the worst at once beneath the grinding sway of the merciless wheels.

Should we never be at C——? How long would that hideous night continue? Was it possible that my tired muscles would much longer endure the strain upon them? And then came a new thought. I remembered that in dear Carrie's last letter she had made me a half-playful promise that she and my sister Clara and the rest would come down to the station and meet me there on the arrival of the night train. That recollection filled my tortured heart with a new anguish as I thought of our mutual love, of the wedding day so soon to come, and of poor Caroline's grief when she should be left widowed of the betrothed bridegroom of her choice.

And then the mental pain was conquered by physical weakness and distress, and my dulled brain preserved nothing but a vague terror lest I should fall—fall beneath those pitiless iron wheels so close to me. And then I seemed to fall again into a waking dream, through which the lights of C—— station gleamed very brilliantly.

Of what followed I have no very clear idea. I remember, in a sudden access of strength and fury, leaping up and springing wildly at the door of the carriage from which I had been thrown. I have a faint recollection of a struggle—of loud shouts and then—darkness.

Afterwards I learnt that the Russian and his confederate had been arrested after a brief struggle, while I had been carried in an unconscious state to a neighbouring hotel. Though badly injured I recovered after many weeks of suffering, and Carrie—who nursed me with the greatest devotion through my illness—wore her jewels at our wedding after all.

Agnes Jewley.

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